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SOME CENTRAL POINTS
OF
OUR LORD'S MINISTRY.

SOME CENTRAL POINTS
OF
OUR LORD'S MINISTRY:

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P R E F A C E .

MOST of these expositions, or expository meditations, upon some passages in our Lord's life and ministry, were originally printed in the *Clergyman's Magazine* at the request of a colleague who was the editor, and they are now reprinted with additions in deference to other requests. Their publication has been much delayed, partly by the author's occupations, and partly by his hesitation in dealing with subjects of such gravity except in the place and time prescribed to him by his duties. After they had been once printed, however, under a sense of obligation to a friend, there were some reasons for publishing them with more completeness ; and the author hopes they may be found to afford some useful suggestions on a subject which

is always of supreme importance, and which commands especial interest at the present day. They were originally written for the pulpit of Lincoln's Inn Chapel, and were accordingly intended to combine practical usefulness with a simple statement of the results of some careful thought and meditation. The author has not considered it necessary in such a volume to refer to authorities; but the reader will, he trusts, feel assured that the best information and criticism have been diligently consulted and considered.

The purpose which has throughout been kept in mind is, in the first instance, to realize the actual circumstances of the various sayings and doings of our Lord which are under consideration, to appreciate their original and native significance, and thus to apprehend their genuine and permanent bearings on religious life and spiritual problems. The author's motive was not the application of our Lord's teaching to any special purpose, however legitimate; but simply the attempt to understand what He said and did, and to discern

what light is thus naturally thrown upon His character, His mission, and our own spiritual and moral condition. To enter into the actual meaning of the Saviour's words and deeds must, in one respect, be a matter of the profoundest difficulty, as they must ever, in their full significance, remain beyond the reach of any imperfect and sinful, not to say finite, mind ; but, on the other hand, as they were intended to help us in our sinfulness and weakness, any sincere and earnest soul, however unworthy, may apprehend some aspect of them, and may thus contribute something of value to their due comprehension. Next to this spirit of humble docility, required alike by our moral and our intellectual imperfection, that which seems most important in such meditations is that we should beware of approaching the apprehension of our Lord's acts and words under the undue influence of any prepossessions, whether traditional or modern, by which they might be coloured, and that we should endeavour to see them in their original and living character. The Gospels are throughout in-

stinct with life and action. Our Lord is dealing with living men and women, whose circumstances we can in great measure understand, whose characters, whose temptations, whose sufferings, and whose sins we can appreciate; and in proportion as we realize, antecedent to any dogmatic conclusions, the living spirit in which He dealt with them, shall we be able to apprehend His living relation to ourselves.

There is an incidental use in such meditations to which it may be worth while to call attention. So far as they enable us to perceive that our Lord in the Gospels is touching, with superhuman power and insight, the very sources of our moral and spiritual being, they may furnish the most practical answer to those critical speculations which would undermine our reliance on the authenticity and trustworthiness of the sacred narratives in the New Testament. If those narratives are found at every turn, and almost at every touch, to reveal to us the very foundations of our religious and moral life, it becomes absurd to attribute them

to the chances or the arts of second-hand compilation, amidst the legendary reminiscences of a second-rate age. It becomes as absurd as it would seem to attribute the hills and rocks of Dartmoor, amidst which this preface is written, to the artificial ingenuity of the novelists or geologists who have based romances or scientific theories upon them. The more the Gospels are simply considered in the spirit already indicated, the more do we find ourselves face to face with the original facts, the primary and stern realities of human nature, and at the same time with a living Lord, who knows them all, who is superior to them all, and who can deal with all the difficulties and problems they present. As the Psalmist sings that "The foundations of the round world were discovered at Thy chiding, O Lord, at the blasting of the breath of Thy displeasure," so the foundations of the spiritual and moral world are discovered at the breath and at the touch of Him whose voice is heard, and whose figure is seen, in the four Gospels. The questions raised by

literary criticism in this century have of course to be met, and they have their interest. But after all, to tell the plain truth, they are mere child's play compared with the real problems presented to the heart and mind by the Gospels and the rest of the Scriptures. They may be the "higher criticism," but they are very far indeed from being the highest; for they do not touch the ultimate realities with which the Scriptures deal, and they arise in too great a degree from mere insensibility to such realities, or from failure to appreciate them.

But this consideration is only incidental, and it is not from this point of view that the present discourses were written. They are the result of sincere endeavours to gain a more real apprehension of the meaning of the Gospels, and above all a better knowledge of the Lord and Saviour whom those Gospels reveal; and they are published in the hope that they may be of some assistance to others in increasing in the same knowledge, and through that knowledge in trust and love.

August 14th, 1890.

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THE SAVIOUR.

*"Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a
Saviour."*—ST. LUKE ii. 11.

I.

THE SAVIOUR.

THESE celestial words, spoken on the day of the nativity of Christ, proclaim to us the special and peculiar blessing which the Gospel announces to all mankind. "Unto you," they declare, "is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour." That is the cardinal truth of the Gospel message, disembarrassed of all details and developments. The nature of this Saviour, the method of His salvation, these are matters of great moment, and are the subject of subsequent revelation; but the primary and central point in the Christian message is this—that there is born unto us a Saviour. The Greek term is a designation of the highest dignity and significance; so much so that the Latin language, in the

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opinion of Cicero, had no single word which could convey its fulness; the word *Salvator*, from which our word Saviour comes, being introduced for the express purpose of conveying this great meaning. It implies not merely a preserver, but one who delivers men from evils from which they could not save themselves; it was a special and appropriate title of the chief Greek god; it implied a power of extraordinary and supernatural intervention, to deliver men from their enemies, their diseases, their corruptions. The judges, whom God raised up of old time to deliver the people of Israel from their various oppressors, are styled their saviours: "Thou gavest them saviours who saved them" (Neh. ix. 27). A Saviour, or a Jesus, is a Joshua; and the greater and more comprehensive the evil under which people are suffering, the higher and more Divine is the office of salvation. This simple announcement, therefore, by its very simplicity, proclaims that this highest of all blessings, in its most comprehensive form, has been conferred upon men. It is tidings of

great joy ; it brings glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men, because it proclaims the advent of One who is able to save men from all their evils, whether those of this world only, or those which extend in their terrible and far-reaching consequences to the next.

As we shall have occasion to observe, a strange difficulty appears to prevail in apprehending the nature of this truth, not to speak of the difficulty of believing it and acting on it ; yet it would seem only requisite to reflect on the condition of men in general, and of our own hearts, to appreciate its supreme blessing and necessity. It may be that the concentration of our thought on nature, in the present day, has obscured our apprehension of the claims of human nature in this respect. The word "Salvation" may be said to have no place in respect to the ordinary course of nature. Strictly speaking, there is nothing there to be saved. The physical world is one vast system of material substances and forces, which discharge their various functions, and

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which discharge them under irresistible and unvarying laws. If we save a plant from corruption, or an animal from death, it is not because either the corruption in the one case, or the death in the other, would have been inconsistent with the function of either, or with the laws of nature. Such products of nature come into existence in obedience to certain laws, and pass away in obedience to similar laws; when they have played their part in the great organism of which they are elements, they are dissolved into their original atoms; and whether they were perfect or imperfect, whether their form was marred or preserved, involves no permanent consequences, at least to themselves. The utmost that is desirable with respect to nature and natural things is preservation — that which would have been expressed by the Latin word *Servator*. But Salvation, the reconstruction of an injured organism, whether individual or complex—this may be said to be at least something of a superfluity in the realm of ordinary nature.

But when we turn to man we find a double

difference. If, indeed, we could adopt the view of some modern philosophers, and contemplate individual human beings as mere parts of nature, whose relations to any other sphere of life than that of the visible world are at least beyond our cognizance, and who really answer to the old Homeric comparison of races of men to the leaves of the forest, which bud forth, and are green and lovely for their time, and then pass away and are at an end—then these further considerations might be of merely speculative importance. But the convictions and instincts with which the Christian message is concerned are of a very different character, and are inbred in all mankind, whether of the ancient or of the modern world. In the first place, there is the profound conviction that, as distinguished from all natural organisms, men and women do not obey the laws of their nature. Call it free-will or not, as you please, the fact is that they have—according as you like to express it—a capacity for not obeying the laws they ought to follow, or an incapacity for obeying them. They are not fulfilling,

day by day, what they were intended for; and they know they are not. They are sensible, not merely of imperfection, but of wrong-doing, of guilt, and of responsibility; and they know that this wrong-doing entails miseries of various kinds, alike upon themselves and upon others. Individual human hearts and human society are disorganized; and no one—no reasonable person among all the sons of men—has ever dared to say, either that he could duly do right himself, or that he could enable others to do it. They may strive after it with varying degrees of earnestness; they may approach it more and more closely; but the failure of men to act up to their convictions, to their consciences, to their hopes—this is the characteristic fact of their nature, as distinguished from the mere animal creation. It is this which introduces questions into moral science which have no place whatever in any other science, and which can be solved by no principles derived from other sciences. In ordinary nature you have to do with things and creatures which are fulfilling the laws

under which they are constituted. In man you have to deal with a creature who is not fulfilling the law under which he was constituted, who knows that he is not, and who bitterly feels his incapacity for doing so. This disorganization of the individual involves a corresponding disorganization in society, which is perpetually bringing on the human race calamities and miseries of the most grievous kind.

Add to this the second distinction to which I have referred, an instinct to which every religion, and if you like the abuses of every religion, bear testimony—the instinct, namely, that this corruption and disorganization of the human heart and of human nature is prolonged in its effects beyond the present life. You cannot philosophize men out of the conviction of a judgment to come. “The sting of death is sin.” If death were only the cessation of the present existence, and we were sure of it, can we, alas! doubt that it would be welcomed by thousands as an escape from unendurable miseries? But their

inbred instinct, their conscience, warns them that it is not, and that the evil they have contracted here, the sins of which their souls are the victims, must, in the natural course of things, accompany them into another life. These are the terrible realities with which man, as distinct from all other creatures in this world, has to struggle—imperfections and sins which he feels his utter powerlessness to remedy, either for himself or his fellows, and which bring upon them the wars, the revolutions, the murders, the social vices which are their curse; and the apprehension of a future life, with the deep conviction that the sins which are the miseries of this life will be also the miseries of the next, if no merciful hand intervene. This is what you have to deal with in human nature—not the mere inquiry into the laws by which it is regulated, as in the case of natural things; but an incapacity to act on those laws when they are known, and so far as they are known; an existing state of corruption, sin, and ignorance, into which men have already fallen;

out of which but few, in comparison to the whole mass of mankind in each generation, are delivered, and against which a minority of the race have for some thousands of years been struggling with but partial success. Is not this a just description of the state of the world at the present moment? How far more dark a picture it would have been necessary to draw, had we confined our attention to the state of the world at the time these celestial words were uttered, need not be considered. What men are craving for still is deliverance—deliverance from their own sins, deliverance of society from its sufferings and corruptions, and the assurance of the deliverance of their souls hereafter from the corruptions under which they have fallen.

These are the cravings which are met by the message of the Gospel; and we shall not share in the blessings it is intended to bring us, except in proportion as we grasp them and appropriate them to ourselves. It is impossible not to recognize that there is an

extraordinary tendency at work around us to neglect and obscure these cardinal realities. Christianity is attacked or defended as a system of truth, as a code of high morality, as a benevolent influence. The moral teaching of Christ, the example of Christ—these and such-like influences of the Gospel are more or less acknowledged. It has recently been said by one of the chief representatives of the non-Christian thought of our day, that the moral hold of Christianity seems greater now than a generation ago. God be thanked if that be so ! But the influence of Christ as an example, the influence of Christ's precepts, as precepts, upon moral life, is but a part of the preciousness of the Gospel, and a part which, if it stood alone, might even bring some additional unhappiness with it, since it would make us the more sensible of our miserable failures. What we need to realize is not only the influence of Christ, but the influence of Jesus—not only the influence and the power of the Prophet and the King, but the influence of the Saviour and the mediating Priest. The message

of the Gospel is that One has appeared in the world not merely to tell us more clearly what we ought to do, but to help us to do it; to be with us individually in our moral and spiritual struggles; giving us the special assistance we need, by the influence of His living and present Spirit; and exhibiting His saving power over His Church and over the world, to deliver it, by His intervention, from the miseries under which it suffers. The message of the angels is not merely that a saving truth has been revealed, or that a method of salvation has been disclosed to men, still less that a perfect standard of morality has been manifested. It is something very different from these abstractions and generalities. It is that "unto you is born a Saviour"—a living Person, who is willing and able to save you—to save you in the most comprehensive sense of the word, in this world and in the next; to cleanse you more and more from your sins; to save you from undergoing all you would otherwise have been liable to suffer, by taking the bitterest share of the world's suffering on Himself; to stand between you and God, to

intercede for you, and be your Friend, in that awful presence ; and finally, to judge you with mercy as well as with justice, and to purify your souls, and render them fit to live hereafter in a world of purity.

These are the blessings which are the "tidings of great joy to all people"—these, and nothing less. Looking round the world at any Christmas season, what reasonable man would not be appalled at the miseries he sees, and the shortsightedness and incapacity of his fellows in attempting to remedy them ! What a blessing to be assured that there is a Saviour—that there is one living Person, Man and God, who is ever living and working to extirpate those evils and miseries, who has His own Divine dispensation for that purpose, who has died* for that purpose, and is now living for it ! In that hope, and with that assurance, the statesman, the philanthropist, the humble Christian can be content to do his best in his own small sphere and with his own feeble lights, confident that his efforts are overruled and controlled by a Divine, and yet

a human and sympathetic power. Or look into your own hearts, and as life goes on look forward to the future life, and who would not be anxious and sorrowful, how many would not be appalled, to think that they would have to pass into another world, into a region of unknown and unrealized purity, truth, and justice, laden with the imperfections which still cling to them, liable to a strict judgment for all the errors and sins they have committed, unable to remedy the harm they have done to others, or even to themselves? Men may shut their eyes to such thoughts for a while, but they will recur, in proportion to our thoughtfulness. What a prospect to pass to the grave with no assurance of a higher hand which we can grasp, to remedy all these sins and sorrows! It is a prospect which men may and do face, no doubt, though with less and less hope as they realize, under the general influence of Christianity, the gravity of moral issues and the prospects of the future life. But what an unspeakable blessing to be assured that we need not

struggle in this world, or pass into the next, in reliance upon our own strength, or subject simply to the terrible and stern results of the moral laws which we have been violating ; but that a Saviour is at hand, here and hereafter, human in His sympathy and Divine in His power, to whom we can confidently look up and say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

This is the message and the assurance which the Gospel brings, as distinguished from all philosophies and all other religions whatever. Of what gravity do not controversies become which tend to divert men's faith from such a Gospel ! Religion is treated as a matter of opinion. Well, I suppose, if men are drowning in the water, it is a matter of opinion whether a boat has been launched to save them, or whether the appearance be merely a mirage. But the issues of life and death depend on their forming a true opinion ; and infinitely more is this the case with respect

to that sea of evil in which we are here struggling, and in which we are all immersed, whether we are for the moment conscious of it or not. Let this be the great truth, then, which this message brings to our hearts. Each one of us for himself, and our country also, and the world at large, has a Saviour. He will not indeed, and cannot, save us without our own concurrence in will and act. We must obey Him, trust to Him, pray to Him. But no one has so trusted Him and found Him fail; and if we look up to Him in our daily lives, and strive to live in His true faith and obedience, He will guide us here in the way that leads to everlasting life, and will bring us at last to a joyful resurrection, in that Divine kingdom which He bought by His blood, and which He will finally reveal at His second coming.

OUR LORD'S MOTIVE.

"And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them."—
LUKE ii. 49, 50.

II.

OUR LORD'S MOTIVE.

FEW passages in the Gospels exhibit more vividly the mysterious combination of the natural and supernatural, the Divine and human, in our Lord, than the brief narrative in St. Luke from which the text is taken, and which tells us all that we know of our Lord from His infancy to the commencement of His ministry. Though this single incident is the only instance in which the veil is lifted by which those thirty years, or so, of His life are covered, it is sufficient to cast a clear and bright light upon the whole of that period, and to reveal to us the spirit in which He was living; and it will be found also to illustrate the manner in which those who would fain be

of service to God and to their fellows should prepare themselves for such tasks.

The first point which strikes us in the narrative is the evidence it affords of the perfect naturalness and simplicity by which our Lord's life at this period is marked. The picture of His tarrying behind in Jerusalem, Joseph and His mother not knowing of it, but going a day's journey, supposing Him to have been in the company, exhibits Him as living a free and trustful life, like other children, mixing with those of His own age, and in affectionate intercourse with His parents' kinsfolk and acquaintances. The perfect freedom from anxiety about the child shown by the conduct of Joseph and Mary at the outset implies an absence of any unusual strictness or formality in their relations with Him, and a feeling that He would be where other children were, and was likely to do as they did. It is a piece of child-life such as might have been seen in any other affectionate and pious Jewish household attending the feast at Jerusalem. Perhaps more suggestive still of the absence

from our Lord's character, at this period, of any of those unnatural features which characterize apocryphal accounts of His childhood, is the fact of Joseph and His mother seeking for Him, for three days, in every place but that in which He was at last found—in the ordinary homes and haunts of children, as it would seem, and not in circles devoted to learning or pious meditation. His question, indeed, in answer to their remonstrance, implies that they might have known more of His character than this. "Son," said His mother, "why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." And He said unto them, "How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" The words need not be understood as a rebuke, but simply as an assurance that He had never thought that His mother would have had any anxiety about Him, or would have doubted for a moment where to find Him, knowing that His supreme interest was in the business of His Heavenly Father. A mother's eye, he seems gently to

suggest, might have been expected to discern what was the central point of His interest. But that Mary did not discern this sufficiently for her thoughts to be at once directed to the Temple appears a striking illustration of the absence—if the word may be used for the purpose of contrast—of unusual professions or pretensions in our Lord's ordinary conduct. His parents seem to have expected Him throughout to do as other children did, and to be found where other children were; and even when He gave them the explanation just quoted "they understood not the saying which He spake unto them." Nor did He even then pursue any special or unusual way of life. The fascination exercised over Him by His Father's house, and by this interview with the great teachers of the law, did not divert Him from the ordinary paths of a child's or a young man's life; but "He went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto them;" and He increased gradually in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

It would surely be unreasonable to endea-

vour to analyse, in the character and conduct of our Lord, as thus exhibited, the precise relation of the Divine and human elements of His nature. It is a combination which we have no means within our own experience of comprehending. It is clear that its workings were beyond the penetration even of the patient and loving eye of His holy mother, who was content to keep all these sayings in her heart, pondering over them, sensible that they contained some great mystery, but unable to unravel it. Such sayings and incidents assured her, as is proved by her appeal to Him at the marriage feast at Cana, of the working in her Son's mind of the Divine Spirit by which He had been conceived; but its union with His simple, and natural, and human character was beyond her understanding. It must remain so for the most part with us; and that which, at all events, it is most profitable for us to consider is the illustration which such manifestations afford of the growth of our Lord's human nature, and of His increase in wisdom. The narrative is a gracious guarantee to us

that in this respect He shared our own experience, and that there is nothing to debar us from following His example, and learning wisdom as He did.

There is, in the first place, something peculiarly welcome to us in the vivid illustration which, as we have seen, the story affords, that supreme devotion to the service of God, and the most perfect religious character, are compatible with the most exquisite simplicity and naturalness in the ordinary relations and conduct of life. Our Lord is the only person to whom the saying could be completely applied, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." His devotion to His Heavenly Father was absolute, and there never has been, nor could be, a religious life like His. Yet His ordinary habits were so entirely like those of His fellows, of other children and young men, that His parents are quite perplexed at His exhibiting for once a tendency different from them. He is a child like other children, a young man like other young men. He lives with His parents at Nazareth, and is

subject unto them, and there is nothing which the Spirit of God deemed it of consequence to the world to know, respecting the first thirty years of His life, than that He was animated by the spirit which this narrative exhibits. What an assurance that in our common relations, and in our daily duties and professions, we may combine the most perfect simplicity and unpretentiousness—perhaps I may even say, the most complete absence of conspicuous and unusual profession—with an entire devotion of heart to God, and earnest fulfilment of His will !

But all this while our Lord was being prepared for His ministry and His mission ; and we may therefore further regard this narrative as exhibiting the spirit, and the method, by which men should be prepared for the duties of life, and made ready to meet the urgent demands which, sooner or later, may be made on all of us. In most lives there are critical moments or years, in which their efforts culminate, and in which the final strain is placed on our characters and our capacities ;

and at all events the duties of life grow more arduous and responsible, and no one is safe unless he is perpetually, as it were, being trained for them. The statement that our Lord increased in wisdom and stature indicates that those thirty years were His time of learning and education, so far as His human nature went, before He was exposed to the great temptations of the evil one, and had to enter on the most awful struggle in the world's history. His mission, as is now generally recognized, was the greatest and most momentous that a son of man has ever fulfilled. It was the central mission of all time, at least, and, as we believe, of all eternity. It was in great measure devoted to the solution of those problems which now engage, and engage so honourably and hopefully, the best interests of our own generation. He was anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor: He was sent to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of

the Lord. That is the very mission which many of the best lives of the present day, even if repudiating in words the faith of Christ, acknowledge as the worthiest office which men and women can fulfil; and the most various and earnest efforts are at work to bring these blessings to the poor and suffering. Our Lord's words and example will be acknowledged, by most of those who devote themselves to such labour, to be the ultimate source of their inspiration; and all, one would think, whether avowedly Christian or not, would be thankful to enter into the spirit by which He was animated and guided in preparation for His work.

To Christians, at least, it is supreme in its illumination and its authority; and its main characteristic is conclusively revealed in this typical exhibition of His general thought. "Wist ye not?"—so He explains what seemed strange in His conduct—"Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" In other words, the whole of His mind was concentrated on the service of God, the will

of God, and the love of God. The practical meaning of the question remains the same, whether we adopt or not the interpretation of the words which some commentators have favoured, "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" for the reason of His being in His Father's house would be that He must be about His Father's business. But the best authorities seem to be on the whole in favour of the old translation; and the inquiry, in any case, reveals a soul absolutely absorbed in the service of God, and seeking every possible means of communion with Him. This was the first recorded word of our Lord. His last was, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit;" and thus, in the Evangelist's words, "He came from God, and went to God." In the first dawning intelligence of His human nature He sought to learn what His Father's business was; in His ministry His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work; and when all is finished He commends His soul into His Father's hands. Such was the communion and the inspiration

in which, for thirty years, our Lord was prepared for the mission of preaching the Gospel to the poor.

What a supreme light does not this simple fact throw on the true principle of benevolent work ! Contrasts are drawn in the present day between the service of God and the service of man, and it is implied that the spirit of devotion to God tends to distract men from the more practical work of relieving the sorrows and sufferings of their fellow-men, and that a truer religion is to be found in a single-minded devotion to the service of man. But what, on any principle of attention to experience and to fact, do men say to the evidence afforded by our Lord's example in this respect ? On any supposition, there never was such a messenger of grace and mercy to the poor as He ; and He derived His power for that message, and His guidance in that mission, from a quiet communion of thirty years with His Father in heaven. When He came forward to preach His Gospel, the example and the character of this Father were His animating

motives. His highest exhortations to mercy and benevolence were founded on the invitation, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect," He exclaims, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." When we bear in mind this early craving to be about His Father's business, and those long years of patient and silent communion with His Father, we cannot fail to realize that it was the vision of God's love, God's mercy, and God's gracious purposes which gave Him, in His character as a man, the infinite patience, the unwavering hope, which constituted so supreme a grace in His ministry.

Men may, indeed, well be inspired with an ardent enthusiasm to help others, when the sufferings of their fellows are brought home to their hearts. But what is to sustain them in the almost desperate efforts they will have to make, unless they have the assurance that they are acting in communion with a power

stronger than their own, and that their work and their efforts are in harmony and union with the will of the Lord and Father of all? If there is one thing more certain than another, in respect to those efforts for social amelioration which so honourably mark our day, it is the extreme complexity and difficulty of the problems with which they have to deal. The hard facts of life, when contemplated from a purely natural and philosophical point of view, are grievously discouraging, and philosophy alone has never discerned in the constitution of the world adequate assurance for dealing hopefully and lovingly with every condition and every sin. What the eye of man discerns, unenlightened by Divine illumination, is a reign of law, under which the weak are crushed, and criminals become more degraded. But there was no weakness and no criminality from which our Lord shrank, or to which He did not extend the hand of mercy and of hope; and why? Because His personal communion with His Father in heaven enabled Him to regard every human

being as the child of that Father, and showed Him the sun of that Father's love, shining, behind the apparent cloud of this world's mists, on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust. Such teaching as that of His parables, which enforces the strict analogy of God's moral government to His government of nature, and which warns men that they reap the consequences of their acts as surely as nature brings each seed to its appropriate fruit, is combined by Him with the proclamation that, none the less, a personal love watches over the soul of each individual, and is training it, even by the very laws which may bring such severe penalties upon it, for a higher life and a better future. He was thus enabled to carry to broken hearts the blessed Gospel of forgiveness—a Gospel which, after all, by earnest souls, is more and more appreciated, as life advances, as the most gracious of all messages to sinful men. The physical sufferings which men have to endure are not the bitterest part of their lot. The burden which weighs upon

the soul when, with advancing experience, it reflects upon its errors and sins, and the harm thus done to others, is the most grievous shadow which lies across the path of life ; and the hearts even of those who are the most burdened by external difficulties may be lightened with an abiding spiritual peace by the assurance of the love of God, of His forgiveness, for their Saviour's sake, of their numerous sins, and of the constant work of His Spirit to remove the consequences of those sins. All this blessed assurance our Lord derived, not from any natural or philosophical principles—those, as present experience shows us, tend too often to obscure such a hope—but from His intimate communion with his Father. He was thus able to be merciful with a perfect mercy, even as His Father in heaven is merciful.

OUR LORD'S EDUCATION.

"And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."—ST. LUKE ii. 46.

III.

OUR LORD'S EDUCATION.

I N our consideration of our Lord's saying, "I must be about My Father's business"—a saying which illuminates, by its sole light, the first thirty years of His life, or the whole time of the preparation of His human nature for the work of His ministry—we observed the manner in which it illustrates the truth that the service of man must be based on the service of God, and that those benevolent impulses which mark our age must seek their strength and their guidance in the trust and love of God, if they are to meet the strain which will be put upon them, and are to carry to the poor the message which, above all others, is needed. Our Lord's mission, as He Himself declared at the outset of His ministry, was to preach the

Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord—the very mission, in its main outlines, which attracts such generous efforts in our day; and by common consent He discharged it, to say the least, with a power and success never since exhibited. But these words point to the fact that, as man, He derived His whole inspiration for that mission in communion with God, and that, so far as His human nature went, His increase in wisdom during the quiet retirement and humility of the first thirty years of His life was in obedience to the proverb, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.” In this respect, in the first instance, it is for Christians to follow His example, and in all their work, private or public, for the good of others in this world, to seek their inspiration, their comfort, and their guidance in communion with their Father in heaven, and to take as the central principle for their

encouragement and their instruction our Lord's exhortation, "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful."

But if we are duly to understand, and to apply, this example of our Lord, we must consider more particularly the method in which He went about His Father's business, even during the time of His retirement and preparation. His parents' inability to understand, as we are told, "the saying which He spake unto them," seems to imply that they did not realize that His devotion to His Father and His Father's work ensured His being found in the Temple. They had sought Him for three days everywhere else; and He implies that, from His desire to do His Father's business, He could not but be engaged as they at length found Him. Why, then, and for what purpose, must He needs be in the Temple? Not surely, at all events, and, it would seem from the narrative, not principally, for the purpose of worship or personal communion with His Father. That personal communion He could enjoy elsewhere, as in after-life on the hills of Galilee, or by the

sea-shore, or alone in a desert place. Not only could private prayer be offered to His Father anywhere and at all times, but it was only on certain occasions that the duties of public worship required His presence in the Temple ; and those duties had been performed, of course, when His parents started on their return home. The purpose for which He had lingered in the Temple is indicated by the occupation in which He was engaged when found by His parents. "He was sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." He was taking advantage, it appears, of a custom that, on Sabbaths and feast days, such as those of the Paschal week, the members of the Temple Sanhedrin were wont to come out on the terrace of the Temple, and there to teach. In such popular instruction great latitude of questioning is believed to have been allowed ; and it is in this audience, which sat on the ground, surrounding and questioning with the doctors, that the child Jesus was found. .

The point, then, of His answer, lay in the

consideration that it was inevitable He should take so precious an opportunity as was afforded by His presence in Jerusalem at the Paschal feast for seeking instruction from the doctors of the Temple in that Divine law in which they were the recognized authorities. If He was to fulfil His mission, that which He felt to be essential, and which His parents ought also to have felt to be essential, was that He should acquire the most thorough understanding of the sacred learning of His nation—of the Law and of the Prophets. Even by Him, in His human nature, the knowledge of His Father's business could not be attained by the inspiration of His own spirit alone, or by His personal intercourse with His Father in the intimate communings of His own heart. His Father's business was to be learnt in the Temple; and in the Temple, not simply as a place of worship, but as a place in which all the legal, historical, and prophetic significance of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, of the history of His nation, and of its sacred Ceremonies, was best understood and taught. On this, and not merely on personal

spiritual devotion or general moral truths, was our Lord's attention directed, for the purpose of increasing in wisdom, and with this object was He sitting among the doctors, seeking to imbue His human soul with the secrets of the sacred lore.

The results of this devotion to the records and monuments of His Father's will is marked throughout His ministry in the most conspicuous manner. His references to the authority and guidance of the Scriptures, especially at the great crises of His life, are most marked and constant. He began His ministry in Galilee by quoting the description of the Messianic office in Isaiah, and declaring, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," and He founded His resolve not to deliver Himself, as He might have done, from His enemies, and from His coming agony, by the inquiry, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God;" "Search the Scriptures;" or, "Have ye not read this Scripture?"—such are His constant appeals to

His opponents. It is not merely, it will be seen, that, for the purpose of argument, it was necessary for Him to accept the authorities recognized by His antagonists, and to argue from their premises; but He makes the Scriptures, and their declarations respecting His work and His sufferings, the foundation of His own action. It is in fulfilment of them that He commences His ministry. It is in obedience to them that He submits to the cross. Not the least remarkable illustration of this complete submission of His own mind, as man, to the guidance and authority of the Scriptures is afforded by the manner in which He overcomes His great initial temptation. We might well have expected that He would have resisted such temptations, or at least have been able to resist them, by His own personal apprehension of the duties which the devil tempted Him to violate. Was it necessary for Him to appeal to an external authority in order to repel an invitation to pay homage to the evil spirit instead of to His Father? Yet in not one of the three temptations does He thus rest

on His own inherent sense of His relations to God, and of the duties they involved ; but He recalls a passage from the Law, and supports His conduct by its guidance and authority. Such an appeal, at such a time, indicates a soul so absolutely imbued with the Scriptures that, so to speak, He thinks in their words, and lives in their life. From their inspiration His human wisdom draws the principles on which His general conduct is founded, and to them He looks to prescribe in all great crises the particular manner in which His mission should be fulfilled.

It claims, accordingly, our particular attention, that our Lord's preparation, as man, for His practical mission of mercy to the poor, and of general benevolence, was laid in a thorough understanding of the previous manifestations of the Divine will, and involved a close conformity, in word and deed, to their instructions. His work and example are too often contemplated as those of an independent moral or religious teacher ; and men do not, at all events, suspect that they are acting out of harmony with the

general character of His example in taking, as it were, new departures, and endeavouring to deal with the social problems and kindred difficulties of life on abstract principles of morality or religion. But our Lord's method was very different from this. He came, in the practical language of our translation, to do His Father's business, and He sought instruction in that business in the revelation of His Father's will which had already been given in the Old Testament.

In those Scriptures, in fact, much more had been afforded than a proclamation of the great central principles of morality and religion. The main scheme of the world's history, and of the Divine purposes for mankind, had been laid down with great clearness—with such clearness, indeed, that its outlines were fully recognized by the Jews of the day, and that the first preachers of Christianity could start from them, as acknowledged first principles, in their addresses to the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles. Among the unbelieving Jews whom St. Peter and St. Paul addressed, there

was no question that their whole history had been a providential Divine economy, leading up to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom under a ruler of the house of David, by whom, in the words of the song of Zacharias, they would be saved from their enemies, to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him. Nor was there any doubt, in the words of the song of Simeon, that He would be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of His people Israel. It was only the particular method of that manifestation to the Gentiles which was matter of dispute, and occasioned the severe controversy which attended the first proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. But the main fact which the Apostles had to establish was not merely our Lord's authority as a teacher, whether of religion or morality, but His possession of a definite and foreordained office in the Divine economy of the world, and even of the universe—an office already well recognized, and which it only remained for them to show that their Master had fulfilled.

The addresses of the Apostles in the Acts are accordingly marked to a great extent by an historical and dogmatic rather than a directly moral character. To the Jews their immediate object is to prove that our Lord is the promised Messiah of the Jewish people; and even to the Gentiles, St. Paul makes it the very fulcrum of his argument to the Athenians that our Lord had been appointed to judge the world in righteousness, as was assured to all men by His resurrection from the dead. The essential step towards the morality inculcated by the Apostles, and the forgiveness proclaimed by them, was the acceptance of our Lord as the Messiah of the Jews, the King and Judge of the whole human race. If this were acknowledged, and men consequently placed themselves under His authority, and applied to Him for the spiritual and moral grace they needed, all morality and all religion would follow by the operation of His Spirit. But the first step must be the acceptance of a positive matter of fact—our Lord's Divine and human supremacy.

How large a part of our Lord's preaching was directed to the same point will be appreciated if we recall the various parables, at the close of His ministry, in which He warned the Jews of the consequences of rejecting His claims. The work He had to do, in short, was to carry forward on a larger scale, free of certain temporary accidents, and in a wider sphere, that scheme of the Divine economy of the world which had commenced when Abraham was summoned to leave his father's house, and of which the throne of David was to all time and eternity the key-stone. In this scheme were involved all the blessings for which the Jews and the rest of mankind craved—deliverance from the power of evil, forgiveness of their sins, and eternal life. But all these blessings were to be wrought out under its development, in harmony with the revelations of the Scriptures in which it was revealed, and in strict continuity. Our Lord's preparation, accordingly, in that human nature in which He increased in wisdom, consisted in acquiring

a perfect understanding of those Scriptures and of this scheme of Divine Providence ; and, in order to do His Father's business, He would not lose the opportunities for learning the meaning of the Law afforded in His Father's house.

These considerations seem to point to certain aspects of Christianity, of the Church, and of the Scriptures, which various influences around us tend to obscure, but which must be of the highest possible consequence if our Lord's example be a guide to us. They remind us, in the first place, that as the Old Testament was not simply a declaration of moral and religious principles, but a revelation of the actual order and economy of the world and of men's history, so is it also with the Gospel. The prophecy that the future Ruler and Light of the Gentiles should be born of David's line, that He should at first be rejected of His own people, should suffer and should rise again, pointed not merely, like Plato's prediction of the fate of the perfectly just man, to general moral principles, but to positive and hard facts. It was by meditating on these prophecies until

the facts they indicated stood out clearly in due prominence before His spirit, that our Lord's human wisdom obtained that firm apprehension of His position and of His duties—or at least, in His own words, of “that which must be”—which was an indispensable source of support to Him in the strain of His great agony. As He looked back over those scenes after His resurrection, when endeavouring to encourage the perplexed disciples, His exclamation was, “O slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” And, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

In a still higher degree, in some respects, is the case the same now with respect to the New as well as the Old Testament. The revelation embodied in the Christian creed proclaims, still more clearly and briefly, not only loftier spiritual and moral truths, but the central facts of history here and hereafter. Then the

prophecy was that the Son of David should assume Divine authority over His own nation and over all mankind. Now it is that He will hereafter return personally and visibly to judgment, and that by means of His Holy Spirit He is now maintaining in the world an organized society, that of the Church, which is as much the centre of human history, and of the Divine purposes, at the present time, as the Jewish nation and the Jewish Church were under the old dispensation. The history of that dispensation ought to be enough to teach us that no apparent difficulties or anomalies should distract our faith in the reality of these facts, and in the gradual development of those purposes. At the time when our Lord appeared, nothing could have seemed so improbable to a human eye as that the old promise of a Saviour arising from the house of David should be fulfilled, and it required the deepest insight into the meaning of the Scriptures to understand the nature of that salvation and the manner in which it was to be wrought out. The Church which our Lord founded is

certainly not in such distress, and has never been in such confusion and error, as His chosen people at the time of His first coming ; and we may be sure that His promises to it, and His revelations respecting its destiny, and the graces of which it is the channel to our own souls and to mankind, will as surely be worked out by His mysterious providence as were His promises respecting the Jews and the house of David.

It is for us, therefore, if we would work in harmony with the will and providence of God, to embrace and hold fast, as the primary principles of our action, alike in private, social, and political life, not only the truths, but the facts, of the constitution of the world, and of the functions of the Church within it, which are revealed to us in Holy Scripture. If it was not for our Lord to appear independently as a moral, religious, and social reformer ; if it was necessary for Him, in the fulfilment of His supreme mission, to bring His whole mind and heart into unison with the established order of Divine Providence for the

salvation of mankind—it must be infinitely more necessary for us to pursue a similar course. Any schemes, accordingly, of social reform or of philanthropy which start from other than Christian principles, and which do not place themselves, as the first principle of their action, in harmony with the Christian revelation and the Christian Church, must be radically defective. They may have good elements in them, and they may be used in God's providence towards accomplishing His own purposes. But their promoters are, to say the least, wasting power; they are missing, more or less, the true line of action, and are failing to place themselves under the guidance of that Divine Spirit, whose purposes are the only things which are stable in this world of mysterious change and development. The importance, from the same point of view, of maintaining, as our own Church does, a complete continuity and harmony of organization with the primitive society founded by our Lord and His Apostles may also be thus realized with especial force.

But, above all, it is for us to remember individually, for our daily guidance, that if we would be in harmony with the will of God in our daily lives, as well as in our social and public duties, our only security lies in following the example of our Lord, and in imbuing our souls, in every possible way, with the teaching of the Scriptures. At a time, in particular, when every institution of human society, from the relations of men and women to the more complex problems of social and political life, is being challenged and tested, we need in a supreme degree the guidance of that spirit of wisdom, of knowledge, and of prophecy, which is enshrined in the Scriptures of the New and of the Old Testament. For the purpose of resisting any misleading tendencies of our own day, our only safety lies in following our Lord's example, and qualifying ourselves, by meditation like His on the Scriptures, to understand what is the revealed will of God, as declared by Him, His apostles and prophets, respecting the difficulties and

dangers around us. In a word, we may well sum up the lesson to be derived from this consideration of our Lord's example, in preparation for the work of His life, in the words of St. Paul: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

*THE
TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS.*

*"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be
tempted of the devil."--MATT. iv. 1.*

IV.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE record of our Lord's temptation must needs be momentous in its import for the comprehension of the spirit of His ministry. The event occurred immediately after He had been fully endued, at His baptism, with the Holy Ghost, for the purpose of His office, and before He entered upon any of His work. It bears the character of a preliminary trial—we might perhaps venture to say, rehearsal—of His qualifications for His awful mission, and must consequently be regarded as exhibiting, in certain crucial instances, the dangers He would have to meet, and the spirit in which they were to be overcome. We are told, at the close

of the narrative in St. Luke, that the devil departed from Him for a season, which may be understood to imply that our Lord's victory was so complete, that the evil spirit did not venture to assail Him again until the time which our Lord described as the hour of the power of darkness.

But this aspect of the narrative seems to receive a special emphasis from another consideration of extreme interest. This record would seem to possess the unique character of being, if we may be allowed the expression, autobiographical. Our Lord was in the wilderness alone, in St. Mark's graphic description, "with the wild beasts." There were none but heavenly witnesses of the mysterious experiences of those forty days. No human eye witnessed them, and their record, therefore, is due to no human observation. By whom then could the narrative have been communicated to the Evangelists, except by our Lord Himself? Of course the supposition is conceivable that the events were revealed to them, after our Lord's departure,

by supernatural revelation. But there is nothing in the rest of the narrative of the Evangelists to lead us to suppose that such supernatural and extraordinary methods were resorted to, for the purpose of instructing them in matters which could have been made known to them through the ordinary sources of information; and St. Luke expressly intimates in his preface that he had made the same kind of inquiries into the facts he is about to record as would have been expected from any conscientious narrator. Though the writers were under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, unnecessary miracles do not appear to have been wrought for their instruction, any more than in any other part of the Gospel dispensation. There is, moreover, one point in the record which seems especially to intimate the action of ordinary human agency, and which throws, consequently, an important light on the general character of the Gospel narratives. The order of the temptations is differently narrated in St. Matthew and St. Luke. In both our

Lord's first temptation is to turn the stones into bread; but in St. Matthew the second temptation is to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple, and the third is to obtain the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, while in St. Luke these two temptations occur in the opposite order. This variation, like others in the Gospel history, and like similar variations in truthful narrations in ordinary life, is of no appreciable consequence as to the substance of the history and its meaning, but it seems quite inconsistent with the supposition of a supernatural dictation, and is at once explained by supposing that the narratives are written from the memory of what had been told to the narrators.

It is therefore in every way most natural to suppose that our Lord Himself had narrated to His Apostles His experiences during the forty days of His temptation. If so, the very brevity of the narrative augments its interest. It cannot be a record of all that passed, whether the temptation, as some commentators

suppose, lasted in various degrees or forms throughout the whole time, or whether it was concentrated into one great struggle at the close. To say the least, many thoughts and feelings must have combined to bring the temptation to its crisis, and many elements must have been present to the mind of our Lord which are not here recorded. But all such details are, by Himself, left on one side in the account He gave of that momentous experience, and all is summed up in these three points. He knew, as none else could have possibly done, what were the essential elements in the temptation to which He had been subjected ; and in His experience and remembrance, the whole power of the evil one was concentrated in the three temptations which He recounted to His disciples. In these three characteristic temptations, therefore, we have the central principles of His ministry, as regarded by Himself, brought to the test at the outset of His career, and we have to discern in them the central points of His struggle.

But we may also discern in them, in some degree at least, the central points of that trial of all human souls which our Lord tasted in its highest intensity. If He was tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin, then, great as must be the difference in degree between the trials of the Captain of our salvation and those of His feeble followers, they cannot be otherwise than similar in their essential elements—that is, in those very elements which our Lord selected for the information and warning of His disciples. We may therefore venture, in endeavouring to understand this narrative, to consider not only what light is cast by it on human experience, but what light that human experience casts back on the narrative itself. These temptations must have been real temptations. They must have addressed themselves to cravings which have a profound root in the necessities and difficulties of the human heart, and which are perpetually driving men to ruin. It is not to be supposed, moreover, that their depth

and force are to be estimated by the brevity and simplicity of the narrative in which they are recorded. Nothing is so characteristic of the Gospels as that they indicate in one or two single touches, in some slight sketch, a whole world of the deepest and most solemn experiences. Every one feels the unfathomable intensity of the few, the very few, words spoken by our Lord in His agony on the cross. Never was so little said, and nowhere is there such an eternity of meaning conveyed. How can it have been otherwise with those temptations which, as we have seen, mark the characteristic elements of our Lord's whole ministry ; so that, when He had gained the victory in them, the devil departed from Him for a season, knowing that it was useless to attempt to divert His course ?

One other consideration may be mentioned which should lead us to look in these simple words for experiences of the most profound import. Few things are more striking, in considering our Lord's teaching, than the

earnestness with which, again and again, He dwells on the danger of temptation. The one human soul that overcame all temptation was also the one human soul that—it does not seem too much to say—dreaded it the most. Doubtless, His temptations were the most terrible of all, but so also was His ability to resist them; and that He should have uttered such repeated warnings against the danger of temptation is a momentous illustration of the spiritual and moral peril to which human nature is exposed. In one touching sentence He seems to sum up the whole of His experience in this word “temptation.” “Ye,” He said to His disciples, as though intimating the deepest of all bonds between Himself and them, “Ye are they, which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.” “Father,” He exclaims, “save Me from this hour,” but immediately submits His will by adding, “but for this cause came I unto this hour.” “Remove this cup

from Me ; nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." What but the intensest experience of human struggle, the most profound sense of the shrinking of the human will from its most deadly trials, could have elicited such appeals to His Father ? Accordingly it is from the depth of His own experience of human weakness, in the hour of His own struggle with the most awful of all temptations, that He exclaims to His disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." More than once, in that supreme moment, as if impelled by His own experience of the terrible struggle to which human nature might be exposed, does He utter that warning. At the commencement of that agony in the garden, "when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation." Was it not only an apprehension of the struggle that was to follow, but a remembrance also of His great temptation at the outset of His ministry, which was

partly present to His mind in that exclamation ?

At all events we know, from these instances, what a profound reality temptation was to our Lord, and how severely it tried the whole capacity of His human nature. When, therefore, He narrated to His disciples the record of His first struggle with the evil one, of the preliminary contest which decided the battle at the outset of His mission, we may be sure that the most severe struggles are veiled behind the simple words in which these incidents are recorded. It cannot be that it was any common hunger which occasioned the first great trial of the Son of man, nor can we doubt that the deepest principles of His spiritual work were involved in the two temptations which followed. What we have to do, in endeavouring to apprehend this narrative, and to discern its relation both to our Lord's ministry and to ourselves, is to appreciate the elements in human nature which rendered these incitements of the tempter so terrible a temptation. Our Lord,

like ourselves, tempted in all points as we are, is clothed in flesh and blood, incarnate in a human body and soul, over which the various elements of the world and the flesh have an innate attraction. That attraction may well be supposed to increase, in some respects, with the very perfection of the human nature thus assumed. Suffering may well have been more intense to so perfect a frame; honour may well have been more deeply prized, and shame more deeply dreaded, in proportion to the nobleness of the mind which felt them; and power may well have had the loftiest attractions for the soul which, above all the sons of men, was capable of exerting that power for the noblest ends. What we are to contemplate is the awful strain and stress of these natural attractions on our Lord's nature, and to see, alike in them and in the manner in which He resisted them, first the primary characteristics of His own ministry, and secondly the characteristic elements of our own moral and spiritual struggle.

I must reserve for a subsequent occasion the application of these considerations in detail to the temptations of our Lord. At present it may be sufficient to observe that our Lord's example, illustrated in the New Testament by the experience of some of His personal followers, and confirmed by that of some of the noblest natures in after times, shows how it becomes us to pray, in the language of His prayer, not only that we may be supported under temptation, but that we may not be led into it—that God, of His mercy, would preserve us from the temptations to which we are so liable to succumb. It may well be that that apprehension of human weakness under circumstances of temptation which our Lord expressed in the warning, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” prompted in great measure His singular and characteristic tenderness to the lost and the vicious. He realized, what we are too apt to forget, in how many cases, though of course not in all, those who have fallen have been exposed to temptations from

which those who stand have been spared. Take the vicious classes of a city like this, and can we doubt that an immense proportion of them have been subjected to a stress of temptation of which we have little conception? A feeling of infinite pity seems to pervade our Saviour's frequent references to this subject. "It is impossible," He says, "but that offences will come; but woe unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He seems ever thinking of the sheep gone astray on the mountains, knowing how easy it is to wander, and how hard to find the way back; and He is ever ready to go in search of it. Doubtless, if we lived with Him as we ought, and trusted Him as He invites us, there are no temptations through which He would not support us. But taking us as we are, viewing our

weakness and the whole mystery of our fallen condition, He seems rather to tremble for us than to blame us; and in the hour of His own agony, when His chosen disciples failed Him, His rebuke to them was the touching exhortation, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

It may help to remind us of this warning if we remember that its spirit is constantly impressed upon us by one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, as well as by the sobriety and humility of tone which marks the whole spirit of that Prayer in relation to ourselves. Its first portion, containing prayers for God's honour and glory, expresses the largest and most comprehensive aspirations. • "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth." No petition for His glory can be too ample or bold. But when we pass from Him to ourselves, the simplicity and modesty of the petitions are conspicuous. For the necessities of our sustentation, in

body and soul, we are taught to be content to ask for our daily bread, for what is sufficient for us, and no more. Then we ask for forgiveness of our trespasses—a forgiveness we confess, at the same time, we all need from each other; and having this necessary food and necessary forgiveness, we ask, as though conscious of our weakness and sinfulness, that we may not be led into temptation. Great as are the graces we know to be conferred upon us, true as it is that we have a Father in heaven, who is ready to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, it does not become us—so our Lord would seem to imply—to seek for great opportunities, or hope for great achievements. It is enough if we are not led into temptation, if we are preserved by God's grace from dangers which we are of ourselves incompetent to meet, and on which we are so apt to enter in a wrong spirit.

But if this should be the spirit of our prayer, it should equally be the spirit of our conduct. In proportion as we realize the

grave character of the temptations to which we are exposed, the fearful results to which some faithlessness may lead, and the manner in which men far better than ourselves have succumbed to such assaults, shall we shrink from putting ourselves forward in any path which is not marked out for us by some plain and unavoidable duty. It was by the Spirit that our Lord was led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; and it is not for us to expose ourselves to the temptations of the evil one, except under equivalent guidance. He who lives in the spirit of our Lord's example on this occasion, and in the spirit of the latter part of the Lord's Prayer, and who realizes the intensity of the spiritual struggle to which we are exposed, will shrink from all spiritual, and even moral, ambition. He will seek to concentrate all his attention on the simple duties which lie before him, in the work of his daily life; his heart, like that of the Psalmist, will not be haughty, nor his eyes lofty, nor will he exercise himself in great

matters, or in things too high for him; but he will behave and quiet himself, like as a child that is weaned from his mother. This is the true Christian temper—never, indeed, to shrink from any effort to which duty may call us, being certain that God will never suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but, realizing that life is much more arduous, and temptations more perilous, than we naturally recognize—remembering that we fight, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers—not to put ourselves forward, or to seek high enterprises, or to judge others, or to condemn the fallen, but ever to walk humbly with our God, and in charity and sympathy with our fellows, praying and endeavouring, in a word, that we may not be led into temptation, but may be delivered from evil.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

"He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—ST. MATT. iv. 4.

V.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

THE temptation of our Lord is, as we have seen, to be regarded as exhibiting the essential elements of that struggle and that endurance through which the Captain of our salvation fulfilled His ministerial work. He Himself, out of the prolonged endurance of those forty days' conflict, must be regarded as having selected these three temptations as containing the substance of the experience which He desired to recount to His disciples; so that this record exhibits at once the essential trials which He Himself had had to meet, and the characteristic forms in which temptation is liable to assault His brethren. In proportion to the depth and intensity of

this experience must be the difficulty of apprehending its nature, and there are accordingly few passages in the Gospels which have been the subject of so much anxious thought, and of such various interpretations in detail. The deepest spiritual experience can alone be competent to appreciate the meaning of our Lord's brief record with any fulness, and its interpretation must grow on us in proportion as we enter, in a similar spirit, into similar conflicts. But it is none the less recorded for our instruction, and so far as we can enter into it, and discern its main elements, shall we obtain an insight into the principles which must guide our own lives,—and shall we learn the way in which alone we can follow the Saviour's example.

Let us, then, take the temptations in order, and endeavour to discern both the characteristic features of each temptation as they affect our Lord, and their counterpart, in lower measure, in ordinary human life. Now the first temptation, to turn the stones

into loaves of bread, was, we are expressly told, addressed to our Lord's sense of physical necessity and suffering, combined with His consciousness of the possession of miraculous powers by which He might have relieved it. "When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." This prolonged fast, accordingly, had reduced our Lord's bodily nature to a condition of weakness and suffering in which He was naturally craving for some relief. Whatever else may have been the effect or the purpose of this long fast, His physical endurance was put to a severe strain, and the tempter suggests to Him, what He well knew Himself, that it was in His power at once to relieve it. He who subsequently fed five thousand men with a few loaves and fishes must have had at His command miraculous resources which would at once have supplied His wants.

To this sense the tempter appeals ; and in what did the evil of the suggestion consist ? There were, it has been observed, other times in our Lord's life and ministry in which He did not hesitate to have recourse to His miraculous powers for His own preservation, as when He passed through the midst of the hostile crowd at Nazareth ; and there would seem nothing essentially wrong in the exercise of such powers.

But our Lord's answer, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," points to the fact that His use of His miraculous power on this occasion would have been inconsistent with the express will and word of His Father. It is to be explained, in short, by the fact that, as the Evangelist says, "He was led," or as one of them speaks, "He was driven," into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. This endurance had, in other words, for reasons beyond our full compre-

hension, been imposed on Him by the Spirit of God, and He would therefore have been acting in disobedience to an express direction of His Father if He had used the power with which He was endowed to escape from the trial. We have a memorable instance of the manner in which the same temptation was met and overcome at the hour when the evil one last assailed Him. He expressly declared, at the moment when He was seized by the Jews, that it was in His power to have delivered Himself, had He so chosen. "Thinkest thou," He said to His disciples, "that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" The case seems precisely parallel; and the temptation we are now considering would thus appear to have been, as it were, a rehearsal of that final conflict.

But as this was the first, and one of the last trials which assailed our Lord, so must

it have been continually at hand, as it were, throughout His whole life. That life was a submission to circumstances of the utmost suffering, weakness, and misery by One who, as His miracles continually showed, and as His words expressly stated, had the power at any moment to emancipate Himself from them. His whole life was one prolonged humiliation, until He finally "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This humiliation was throughout animated by the spirit expressed in this answer to the evil one, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It was the will of God that He should thus submit, that He should be made perfect through suffering, and so become the Author of eternal salvation to all them that should follow Him; and He subdued all the cravings and inclinations of His bodily and mental nature to the will of His Father. His final prayer, "Not My will, but Thine be done," received its first exemplification in

this temptation to relieve the cravings of prolonged hunger, and was put to a similar strain throughout His whole ministry. Alike in the simplest wants of human nature, and in its intensest desires, He showed the example of absolutely submitting His human will to His Father's will, and to His own higher will.

It would seem obvious that this is an example of the earliest and simplest, and yet in some respects the most persistent, temptation by which ordinary human beings are beset. The commonest temptations of life are aroused by physical cravings, together with the opportunity for gratifying those cravings in a manner which is contrary to the declared will and ordinance of God. Some of the ten commandments, such as those which protect property and preserve the sanctity of marriage, and the last, which forbids coveting, are directed against this elementary temptation. The tempter is perpetually saying to men, You can gratify this passion, or relieve this necessity, by disre-

garding the arbitrary rules which have been imposed on you. It is natural you should do so, and you would be but calling into play capacities which are inherent in your nature. How often do not men lay this unction to their consciences, if not for offences condemned by human law, yet for private and secret sins, known to God alone? But they know, at the same time, that they are acting against the higher law of their nature, against a rule and order expressly laid down by God Himself for their guidance. Their only safety is in grasping the principle which our Lord here asserted in answer to the tempter, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

In excuse for some offences of this kind, it was once pleaded, "A man must live;" and it was replied, "I don't see the necessity." That was the Stoic form of the principle which our Lord here asserted in the gracious tones of the Gospel. It is true, in the highest sense, that a man must

live. But his life does not consist in the mere gratification of his bodily cravings, or even the natural desires of his mind and heart. The essential life of his nature consists in his living and acting in harmony with the will of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." So far as it is necessary for man to live here, all natural provision that is essential for him will be made by his Father in heaven. It is unnecessary for him to take any thought, saying, "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" for our Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things. But let a man seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto him.

It adds infinite weight to that exhortation that it was spoken by One who, as this temptation shows, knew full well that it was consistent with the infliction of severe endurance and grievous want. It does not

involve a promise that God will spare men all suffering and evil, and supply every wish and craving of their bodily nature. It asserts that He will do so, as far as is consistent with their own best welfare, and with His general purposes for themselves and others. No man or woman can expect to have our Saviour's promises fulfilled to themselves in a higher degree than that in which they were fulfilled to Him. He felt assured that He was in the hands of His Father; He knew, as none else knew, the depth of that Father's love, and His unwillingness to impose more sacrifices or sufferings upon His children than are necessary for the vindication and establishment of righteousness on the earth. Knowing this, He felt it no inconsistency with these ample declarations that His own life should present the most striking contrast, in external appearances, to the assurances He proclaimed. His life was surrounded by none of the glory of Solomon; and though He says in the same exhortation, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither

do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them," He said on another occasion, "The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

But if His experience illustrated the apparent contrasts of life to the exhortations of His Sermon on the Mount, it illustrates not less forcibly the higher and final meaning of those promises, and the principle on which He relied in His temptation—that man should live, but not by bread alone. For after His humiliation, even to the last extremity, in which He refused to save Himself, He rose in a power and glory which fully answered to the true necessities of His bodily, no less than of His spiritual nature. His body was sown in corruption, it was raised in incorruption ; it was sown in weakness, it was raised in power ; it was sown a natural body, it was raised a spiritual body. The life of man, He proved by His experience, is not to be measured by his wants and cravings in his present existence. It has an eternal

character, and is destined for an everlasting sphere. There, for whatever a man may have foregone here in obedience to the Word of God and to His will, he will be abundantly rewarded, and it will be seen that a man's true life consists in "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

There is surely too much evidence around us that the lesson of this temptation is one which needs to be deeply impressed on mankind, and that it is the only principle which can preserve society in general, as well as our individual lives, from confusion and ruin. It is, after all, too much to expect human nature, as a rule, to act on the stern principle that life and blessing are not necessary. The desire for them, the craving for their enjoyment, is deeply stamped in ineradicable characters on the soul of man; and if the hope of them be utterly baffled, human nature rises in desperation. It is true that violations of the elementary laws of human society revenge themselves, even in this world, and that no class, and few individuals, can

acquire even apparent happiness by attempting to satisfy their needs in wild and revolutionary disregard of the principles of mutual honesty and of the elementary laws of all society. But it is none the less true, that if you exclude from the view of mankind the only assurances which offer them adequate compensation for suffering and self-denial here, you expose them to a temptation, which you have no right to expect they will have the power to resist, to relieve their wants and miseries by some swift and violent method. The one supreme and controlling power, alike in the life of nations and in individual lives, is afforded by the principle our Lord here asserted, as the ground of His own patient endurance, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Go to the most suffering, the most poverty-stricken, and most humble of mankind, and bring home to their hearts the Saviour's assurance that they are endued with a spiritual life which is independent of their external circumstances, which may be brought to higher

perfection by suffering than by enjoyment, which depends solely on the will of God, and will assuredly be realized in proportion to their faithfulness to that will;—make them feel, in a word, by the Saviour's teaching, that they have in their hands the words of their Father in heaven, words by which their souls can live here and hereafter, and which will bring forth the fruit of an eternal and perfect life;—convince them that the true remedy for their own miseries and those of their fellows lies in the faithful and unselfish performance of all the ordinary duties of their lot, and you will not only give them a comfort which will be infinitely superior to any physical blessing they could otherwise obtain, but you will have sustained them in the only course by which the condition of the world can be permanently ameliorated.

This temptation of the devil is, in short, perhaps the most elementary and most common temptation with which the whole world is tried. From the heroic sacrifices sometimes required of duty, through the ordinary self-

control imposed by common moral obligations and honour, to the patient endurance of hunger and want—all alike bring men and women face to face with the question whether they will gratify a craving—it may be the intense craving of the famine of the body, or that of the famine of the heart—by some means not consistent with the obligations under which they know themselves to be placed by the will of God, and by His express law. Strong natures may resist such temptations by Stoic fortitude. But they need not be driven to so severe a resource; and the Saviour's answer to the tempter implies a gracious assurance in which every human soul may rest in such moments of conflict. The life of men, their eternal life, the life of all blessing and peace, is enshrined in those words of God which are given to be their daily food; and it, like the Saviour, they are content to live upon them, to trust them, and to cling to them amidst all the struggles and dangers of this present existence, they will not be left unsupported even here; angels

will come from time to time to minister to them, as they ministered to the Saviour at the close of His first series of temptations; and above all, His Beatitudes are their inheritance, as when He declared, "Blessed be ye poor : for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now : for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now : for ye shall laugh."

THE SECOND TEMPTATION.

*"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not
tempt the Lord thy God."*—ST. MATT. iv. 7.

VI.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION.

WE have considered the first temptation suggested by the devil to our Lord, and it was seen to be addressed in the first instance to His sense of physical weakness, and to be an attempt to induce Him to relieve His necessities by means within His power, but inconsistent with the commands which had for the time been laid upon Him. It was overcome by the principle of faith and obedience, illustrated by the example of God's provision for the people of Israel during their stay in the wilderness. Their experience was an instance that, whatever endurance God may require of His people, He will give them sufficient support for their own good and for His purposes. The second and third temptations are addressed to cravings of a higher, and therefore, at least

in a lofty nature, of a severer character. In endeavouring to understand them, we need more especially to bear in mind that, from the brevity with which they are narrated, the central and characteristic point only of the temptation can be mentioned, and that we must reflect how this bears upon the whole experience of our Lord, and is illustrated by similar examples in purely human experience. It is difficult to suppose, for instance, that the second temptation, that our Lord should cast Himself from a pinnacle of the Temple, is sufficiently explained by the brief description given of it by Milton, who makes it consist in little more than an indifference to a position of physical danger. As the passage runs in *Paradise Regained* (IV. 551):—

“ There stand, if Thou wilt stand ; to stand upright
 Will ask Thee skill ; I to Thy Father's house
 Have brought Thee, and highest placed ; highest is
 best :
 Now show thy progeny ; if not to stand,
 Cast Thyself down ; safely, if Son of God ;
 For it is written,—‘ He will give command
 Concerning Thee to His angels : in their hands

They shall uplift Thee, lest at any time
Thou chance to dash Thy foot against a stone.'
To whom thus Jesus: Also it is written,
'Tempt not the Lord thy God.' He said, and stood;
+ But Satan, smitten with amazement, fell."

Such an interpretation offers a strange contrast to the magnificent imagery with which Milton has drawn out the force of the other temptations; and it seems unworthy of the occasion, and of the deadly spiritual conflict which must have been involved in the temptation of our Lord. +

It will probably be felt to be a safe rule in interpreting the significance of these temptations, that the principles and examples to which our Lord appealed in meeting them must be taken to indicate their central character, and the nature of their moral and spiritual stress. In quoting Scripture, He always appeals to its living and historical sense, and never quotes a saying without direct reference to the circumstances which determine its meaning. So His answer to the first temptation is not a mere quotation of a text, but an appeal to the great

historical example of faith in the case of the Israelites.

Let us consider, then, what is the example to which He appeals for support in the present instance. It is the record of the murmuring of the children of Israel because there was no water for them to drink. "Wherefore," we read, "the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? . . . And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the

place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?"

This, then, is the meaning of that tempting of the Lord which our Saviour resisted, and it is therefore to be supposed that the evil suggestion of the devil was founded upon a similar experience in principle to that to which the Israelites yielded. The manner in which they tempted the Lord was by doubting whether He were among them or not. What was there in our Lord's experience to bring a similar question before His mind? This inquiry we find answered by numerous illustrations throughout the Gospel history. The characteristic demand of the Jews was for a sign. "What sign," they said to Him, more than once, "showest Thou unto us, seeing Thou doest these things?" In other words, they repeated the question of their ancestors, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" They craved for some visible, overwhelming proof that our Lord's

mission was from Heaven. The ordinary miracles of mercy which He wrought were not sufficient for them. Something was needed which should overwhelm them by its magnificent and, so to speak, prodigious character.

It seems remarkable, moreover, that the temptation is one which was not altogether confined to the perverted desires and expectations of the ruling classes. Some kind of anxiety of the same character seems to have possessed for a while even the mind of the Baptist, when, in the depression of his imprisonment and the apparent defeat of his mission, he sent disciples to our Lord, saying, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" To this faithful servant our Lord replied by appealing to the characteristic signs of His mission, to the miracles of grace and mercy which He wrought, and finally to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor; but added, "Blessed is he, who-soever shall not be offended in Me;" Blessed is he, that is, who shall not find a stumbling-

block in the comparative simplicity and lowliness of My work and position. But the demands of the Pharisees He constantly refused, vouchsafing only mysterious references to the great and cardinal evidence of His mission, His subsequent resurrection. So when He purged the Temple, at the outset of His ministry, and they demanded a sign to justify such an act of authority—a demand they would not have made had they recognized, as they ought, the inherent moral authority to which our Lord appealed when He said, "Make not My Father's house an house of merchandise"—He answered enigmatically, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They had no right to a sign at that time, while they were insensible to their obvious moral and spiritual obligations, and a sign would hereafter be given, full of the profoundest significance respecting the destiny of the holy Temple itself. So again, He once exclaimed, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall

no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas ; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Such was the natural attitude of the leaders of the Jews, and, in the end, of the multitude as a whole ; and it may possibly be that the evil spirit himself, who cannot be supposed to have been cognisant of the whole Divine economy embodied in our Lord's person, may have exhibited with intenser malignity the same craving to have the reality of our Lord's mysterious power demonstrated to him by some overwhelming manifestation. It has been the belief, at least, of some of the Fathers, that he was ignorant of the full significance of the great drama which was being worked out in our Saviour's life and death.

But however this may be, it would seem evident that we have here an exhibition of the craving which is natural to the human heart in circumstances of such supreme

struggle as that in which our Lord was engaged. The human heart has not the patience and the faith which are necessary to enable it to wait for the slow development of God's purposes, and craves for some overmastering exhibition of Divine authority to induce it to believe. Every one is familiar with the saying of the unbeliever, a century ago, that if God had given a revelation it would have been written with letters of fire in the firmament. That is precisely the character of the old temptation of the Israelites, when they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" All the previous exhibitions of His hand and arm, and of His interposition in their affairs, were forgotten, and in the strain which thirst brought upon them they at once began to chide, complaining that they had not evidence enough of His presence. All around us now the same question is asked, the old experience being alleged to be insufficient, and some more startling and compelling evidence being required. This being a

temptation so deeply rooted in human nature, we may in some measure understand its being presented to the mind of our Lord. Although He overcame it decisively by reference to this principle, that "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," may He not well have experienced—with a similar intensity to that with which He shrank in the garden from the cup of suffering which was offered to Him—the craving of the Baptist, and of Elijah, the Baptist's prototype, for some means of at once putting an end to the doubt, the hesitation, the disbelief, which prevailed around Him? When surrounded by defiant and angry Pharisees, striving to stand between Him and the sinning and suffering souls who came to Him for comfort, obstinately refusing His appeals, deaf to His penetrating spiritual teaching, hardening their hearts to His words of mercy and gentleness, and finally impervious even to His denunciations, would it not have been a severe temptation to the greatest of the sons of men to bring into action such power as

was at His disposal, and thus to overbear at one stroke these hard and malignant objectors, and to carry their convictions captive by some sign of portentous significance? Perhaps it was to this temptation that Moses, the meekest of men, yielded when he exclaimed, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" If so, the consideration will help to explain the gravity with which that outbreak of Moses' anger was punished. But what was the temptation to the great leader of the Jewish people in the wilderness compared with the temptation to the Messiah to work some similar sign, in His righteous anger, for the purpose of vindicating His authority, and overbearing the opposition to His just claims?

From this point of view we may well understand that this was a trial which was perpetually at hand in the crises of our Lord's ministry, and how it may have been realized, in one characteristic temptation, at the outset of His ministerial work. Some of the best commentators are accordingly

inclined to believe that there was a peculiar appropriateness in the scene of the temptation being placed in the holy city, on a pinnacle of the Temple. To quote a recent and very instructive writer, Dr. Edersheim, on this point, "In this temptation Jesus stands on the watch-post which the white-robed priest has just quitted. . . . In the priests' court below Him the morning sacrifice has been offered. . . . Now let Him descend, Heaven-borne, into the midst of priests and people. What shouts of acclamation would greet His appearance! what homage of worship would be His! The goal can at once be reached, and that at the head of believing Israel." Some such vision, at least, would seem to be embodied in this temptation. Just as in the third temptation, to be considered subsequently, an immense vista of worldly power and magnificence is unrolled before our Lord's eyes, so in this crisis the whole course of His painful ministry may well have been present to His thoughts. The rejection at the outset in the

holy city, the scorn for the Nazarene and the Galilean, the doubt, the contempt, the blasphemy—all has to be faced, all doubtless were foreseen. He was looking forward, in this critical hour, to the bitter experiences of those three years, and to their ultimate failure; and the suggestion is made to Him, by the tempter, that by one display of supernatural force in the heart of the holy city, by casting Himself from a pinnacle of the Temple, all may be avoided; that He may demonstrate that He is the Son of God, and take the priesthood itself by storm. One other experience of the same kind is recorded, although it represents the temptation from a more bitter and terrible side. He is tempted now by the prospect of asserting His claims in triumph, without the conflict designed for Him. But at the last hour of His work He was tempted to a similar display, in order to save Himself in the hour of bitter misery. The rulers exclaimed, as He hung upon the cross, "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from

the cross, that we may see and believe." In His first trial, when standing on the pinnacle of the Temple, He overcame the same temptation as that which was thus hurled at Him when He hung on the cross. But from first to last He was resolved to endure the whole bitterness of His rejection, and to work out the mission imposed on Him by His Father with no other means than those which His Father had prescribed. When he exclaims, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the very temptation seems to be near Him of doubting whether God was with Him of a truth ; but it is again overcome, and He finally exclaims, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

The bearing which this temptation has on the grounds of our belief has been already suggested. Now, as in our Lord's days, no sign is vouchsafed which will suffice to overbear the convictions of men who are not open to the recognition of our Lord's moral and spiritual claims ; and if they hear not

Moses and the prophets, neither are they persuaded though One has risen from the dead. But the temptation applies more closely to ourselves in those hours of darkness and despair which resemble the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, when it seems hard to believe that the sufferings and difficulties we have to encounter can have been imposed on us by a God of perfect goodness, and we doubt whether God is among us or not, and crave for some special manifestation of His presence. It is part, however, of our moral and spiritual education to have no such sign, but to be content to follow the example of the Saviour in placing perfect trust in God's love and God's providence, and not to tempt Him by entertaining any doubt of His goodness, or craving for exceptional assurance or assistance. In a word, "let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."



THE THIRD TEMPTATION.

"Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."—ST. MATT. iv. 10.

VII.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION.

IT remains for us to consider our Lord's third temptation, when "the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me ;" or as the narrative stands in St. Luke, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine." That this was the last and deadliest of the three temptations would seem to be indicated by the indignation with which it is spurned by our Lord. "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get

thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." As with the previous temptations, it will assist us to understand this the better if we endeavour to apprehend how it affects human nature under ordinary circumstances, as exhibited in historical examples.

A difficulty has been felt, in the first place, in understanding how the tempter could suppose that so monstrous a condition could for a moment be entertained by one like the Son of God, as that He should worship the evil one. But if we bear in mind that it is an essential part of the art of the tempter to disguise the real character of his suggestions, and that he is content, at least in this world, with a practical homage, while its real nature is veiled from those by whom it is rendered, it will probably appear too plainly that this brief and summary description of our Lord's final struggle exhibits the true description of the most deadly temptation to which human nature has succumbed. Let us con-

sider, in the first instance, what is the extent of the truth contained in the assertion, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will I give it." Like all the tempter's suggestions, it contains a truth so perverted as to become a falsehood. It is not true, in the literal sense of the words, that all the power of the world is delivered into the hands of the evil one ; for God has not abdicated His government of the world, and all is being directed, under His providence, to that ultimate end when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. But it is at the same time true that the world is to a large extent under the power of evil and of the evil one. The mere fact that it is part of the Divine discipline and probation of mankind that they are left to work out, to a certain extent, the consequences of their original crimes and of their continual sins, implies and involves this result. So far as God and God's will do not

assert their supremacy in every heart, so far evil and the spirit of evil are predominant. Much of the language which seems strange to us in the teaching of the early Fathers on the subject of the Atonement may become intelligible from this point of view. They speak, for instance, of our Lord having paid a ransom to the evil one ; and the conception has sometimes been exaggerated into grotesque forms. But it is generally recognized that, in some sense, our Lord's sufferings were the fulfilment of the natural power of evil to which men had surrendered themselves. They were the result of the enforcement of that law which attaches ruin and misery to the violation of God's will ; they may in this sense be regarded as exhibiting in great measure the effectual sanction of that law ; they are thus spoken of with justice as a satisfaction to it and its claims ; and so far as the evil one is the agent in maintaining and enforcing the power and the consequences of evil, so far might this sanction and satisfaction be regarded as rendered to

him. The power of evil is as distinctly regarded in the Scriptures as embodied in a personal agency as is the principle of good ; and consequently all that men recognize respecting the prevalent power and influence of evil is concentrated in this statement of the tempter, that to him is delivered the glory and the power of this world. In this sense our Lord distinctly recognizes him as the prince of this world, and the Apostle speaks of him as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

But in reference to this interpretation, what fact is more generally recognized by those who have the best knowledge of the world, than that evil in some form, and especially that vice of falsehood which is the chief characteristic of the evil one, is bound up to a terrible extent with worldly power and influence ? "That," says Lord Bacon, "which doth bring lies in favour, is a natural, though corrupt, love of the lie itself. This same truth is a naked and open daylight,

that doth not show the masques, and mummeries, and triumphs of the world half so stately and daintily as candle-lights. . . . A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. . . . Mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it." If one of the wisest of Englishmen could acknowledge, in the forefront of his meditations, that falsehood is a constant element in the pleasure and the power of life, was the tempter indulging in more than this same "mixture of a lie" when he alleged that all the glory of the world was delivered into his false hands? It may be observed, moreover, as illustrating the specific character of the temptation, that this mixture or prevalence of falsehood is, in common human opinion, peculiarly associated with the arts of government and of conquest. Machiavellism and Jesuitry are essentially political arts, and it is in the government of mankind, in the assertion and maintenance of power, that those false lights of which Lord

Bacon speaks are most visibly and generally effectual in conciliating or cajoling men's acquiescence. Bare and absolute truth, its naked and open daylight, is, to say the least, too rarely practised or reckoned among the arts of government.

Now, with this melancholy truth in view, history will be found to throw a terrible light upon the intensity of this temptation of the evil one. The temptation, it will be observed, though involving a gross and revolting surrender to evil in its result, is nevertheless one which appeals in its full force only to the noblest and most powerful minds. It is only to those who are capable of the loftiest dominion that a suggestion can be made, with any effect, which offers them all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. A man must be conscious of the highest powers, and perhaps also of the highest intentions, before such a vision can acquire sufficient reality to be an element in his temptation. Accordingly, if we seek for examples of such sins, we can only

find them among the leaders of men. But when we look there, we see, in instance after instance, that this deadly temptation has led to the most fatal perversions of truth, and has inflicted the most disastrous results upon mankind. Take, as perhaps the most conspicuous of all examples, the case of Mahomet. Few will deny that, at the outset of his career, he was imbued with a deep conviction of the most vital truth of religion, and was animated by a sincere enthusiasm to reassert it among his countrymen. His career began, accordingly, in self-devotion and simple assertion of truth. But the hour soon came when the suggestion arose in his mind that he might accelerate the triumph of his own principles by some compromise with truth and justice, by acts of policy involving deceit and violence. His own power became identified in his mind with that of the cause he originally asserted, and he began to think that some alloy in the gold and silver with which he was entrusted might make the

metal work the better, and so he consented to embase it. Increasing visions of power in the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, rose before his mind ; he consented to pay to the principle of evil the homage which was suggested to him ; and whereas he might, within the range of truth entrusted to him, have been a true prophet, he became, what he has ever since been justly called, a false one. The bargain of the evil one was strictly kept. To an extent unprecedented in the case of one man, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were delivered over to the dominion of himself and his successors ; but the curse of falsehood has remained attached to the Mahometan empire, and is daily involving it in deeper ruin and degradation.

But there is another instance, more memorable still, and coming home more nearly to Christian minds. It is that of the Papacy. No thoughtful mind can fail to pay honour to the noble conception which animated the first great Popes, in their endeavours to

establish the authority of our Lord and of His Gospel over the world which was gradually rising out of the old Roman empire and the Germanic races. It was a conception equally magnificent in its moral and political grandeur, and its partial realization has conferred, in many respects, incalculable blessings on mankind. Being, in great measure, based on truth, it has never been entirely frustrated ; and it was the means of laying the foundation of Christian civilization, and of establishing the Gospel as the fundamental law of modern life. But, at the same time, there is no more melancholy instance of the force of the tempter's suggestion. The hour came, again too soon, when the great Popes felt that the object they had in view might be promoted, or accelerated, by some compromise with the powers of evil, with convenient frauds and forgeries, with opportune acts of violence, and forcing of consciences. To them, perhaps, it was a greater temptation than human nature has ever succumbed to, for they were surrounded by the traditions of the greatest

statecraft the world has ever seen. But however this may be, they yielded to it ; and the evil one again fulfilled his bargain, so far as was allowed him by the providence of God ; and the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were to a vast extent delivered into papal hands. But the ultimate result of the employment of this alloy of falsehood was to embase even the Church of Christ itself, and to lead to an ever-increasing corruption, so intense that it could only be removed by the most disastrous convulsions. The result, in both the cases we have considered, has been to entail on long generations a terrible curse, to delay for centuries the full recognition of the truth, and thus to fulfil the very object of the evil one.

How often, we may well ask, has not the same temptation marred the career of individuals capable of appreciating the highest truths, and conferring the greatest blessings on mankind ? How near to every ruler of men, to every great statesman, is not the temptation to identify his own power, his own

possession of the kingdom of the world and its glory, with the triumph of the truth itself, to which he was, at the outset, and in his heart, maybe, he is still, attached, and to purchase power and applause by some compromise with strict truth, by some half-unconscious consent to yield to popular passion and prejudice? It is not a vulgar temptation, but it is none the less perhaps the deadliest of all, and certainly the most disastrous in its results to the vast numbers whose destiny it affects.

It is this, then, which in this brief narrative appears to be described as suggested by the tempter to the mind of One whom he knew to be more capable than all the sons of men of exercising a dominion, and a beneficent dominion, over mankind, but whom he did not know to be superior to the least breath of falsehood. To obtain power, not by openly and avowedly vicious means, but by some compromise with the influences of evil; to consent that the people should make Him King, as they were once on the point

of doing, on their own terms; to obtain the support of the ruling classes by abstaining from a full denunciation and repudiation of the falsehood which was engrained in them—how often might not this temptation have presented itself to Him in the course of His career, up to the last moment, when Pilate said, “Art Thou a King, then?” A King He was. “Thou sayest,” He replied, “that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” That was what our Lord had been doing throughout His ministry—bearing witness to the truth in every man’s conscience, relentlessly insisting on the recognition of that truth, tearing away all moral subterfuges, and making every soul tremble at the revelation of its own evil. He bore that witness to the last, and permitted human nature to bring to light all its corrupt antagonism to moral and spiritual truth by putting to death the King of truth. By submitting to that death, He finally revealed and impressed

upon the convictions of mankind, the terrible untruthfulness and corruption of human nature, more vividly than by all His preaching. By His death the nature of sin was finally manifested, and its fearful penalties exhibited to the world. But at how bitter a cost that witness was borne is painfully impressed on us by the narrative of the Passion. He knew what this absolute adherence to truth, this resolve to pay no homage, even for a moment, to any will or influence save that of the God of truth, would entail; and it seems remarkable that the only occasion on which He uses again the expression in the text, "Get thee behind Me," was when Peter would have had Him refuse so terrible a sacrifice in obedience to His Father's will. "Get thee behind Me, Satan : . . . for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." He had not come to establish a kingdom of this world, but to set up an eternal kingdom over men's hearts in heaven. In this world, therefore, He has never ruled in the sense which the evil one suggested ;

but His kingdom has been gradually growing over men's souls; and when it shall hereafter be revealed, then shall the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ

In one sense this temptation is far removed from ordinary lives; in another aspect it comes perhaps more closely home to us than either of the others. Few men are tempted to pay homage to the spirit of untruthfulness for the sake of dominion over the kingdoms of the world, and for their glory. But it is a question we all have to decide whether we will seek, by some compromise with truth + in our words and actions, for success, honour, and applause among men, or whether, by absolute obedience to the God of truth, we will seek a home in His heavenly kingdom, as subjects of the King of Truth. The temptation of our Lord illustrates the real character of our conduct if we are ever false + to truth. We are really, however we may disguise it from ourselves, paying homage to the Power of Evil. The principle, on the

other hand, which our Saviour's example sets before us, is that of offering homage to no other will or influence than that of the God of all truth and righteousness, to worship and fear the Lord God only, and Him only to serve. It is the principle of obedience to that which we believe to be the will of God, whatever the sacrifices, the self-denials, the pain it may involve. It is an obedience which will consist, as a rule, in very ordinary and humble observances, in patient submission to the circumstances of our lot, in the firm and gentle discharge of every-day duties, and in the sensitive faithfulness of a conscience which remembers at what a price the spirit by which it is quickened was bought. Any such consistent, faithful, and patient life will cost some sacrifices to any one who steadily practises it. But it can never cost any of us what it cost the Saviour, and whenever we are tempted to falter in this path, what more ought we to need than to remember the words, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" ?

*OUR LORD'S MANIFESTATION OF
HIMSELF.*

*"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee,
and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed
on Him."* JOHN ii, 11.

VIII.

OUR LORD'S MANIFESTATION OF HIMSELF.

THIS manifestation of our Lord's glory is the conclusion of a series of incidents, recorded only by St. John, of a very peculiar interest, and it must be considered in connection with them if its due significance is to be appreciated. In few and simple touches, like the strokes of a great artist, the narrative sketches for us the very beginnings of the Christian society, the germs of that vast body of disciples of whom our Lord is the centre; and we are thus enabled to see, in their elementary action, the influences by which that society is mainly formed. The narrative of the miracle is connected with the incident which had preceded it by the words, "And

the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage." The effect of the miracle, therefore, on our Lord's disciples is intimately associated with the events of the previous three days; and it is within this period that the influences just mentioned were operating. Immediately after our Lord's baptism He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness; after His temptation there, He appears to have returned immediately to the neighbourhood of Jordan, where John was baptizing; and John was then the means of directing to our Lord the disciples who first attached themselves to Him.

The narrative of the incidents which followed is admitted by writers who are the least bound to traditional views to bear striking marks of proceeding from an eye-witness, or rather from one of the actors in the scene, the Apostle John himself. We read that "the next day after"—the first of several little marks of time—"John stood, and two of his disciples; and

looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God ! and the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned"—the narrative being equally particular as to gesture as in respect of time—"and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye ? They said unto Him, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou ? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day : for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." Dr. Karl Hase, one of the writers to whom I just referred, asks whether the writer who has such a knowledge of minute particulars must not have known also the name of the other disciple. And what is the meaning of this minute particularity ? This is either, says Dr. Hase, an unskilful and careless narrative, or else it is prompted by personal interest and recollection. The character, he says, of this Gospel, the most marked by profound thought, leaves us no choice. The other, the anonymous,

disciple is "that veiled form which moves through the fourth Gospel," St. John himself, who here reveals his first meeting with his Master, and has preserved the remembrance of that momentous hour. To him, while he writes, everything is still present: the first words his Master uttered, slight as they were, His turning Himself, the hour of the day. Just so it is, observes Dr. Hase, even with ourselves in minor matters; the moments never fade away when some beloved voice has for the first time greeted us.

The Apostle is thus narrating his own experiences of that first interview, and of its results. Those results are indicated in the next verses. "One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah." That day's interview, after the tenth hour, had been sufficient to produce this conviction on the minds of both Andrew and John. It was an immense conclusion to come to in so brief an intercourse,

and it is doubtless in great measure to be explained by the previous influence of John the Baptist. He had been preparing the way of the Lord, not only by his exhortations to the people, but by his teaching to his own disciples; and it is evident, from illustrations of that teaching preserved in St. John's Gospel, with what earnestness he had impressed on their minds both the fact that the Messiah was at hand, and had been baptized by him, and the spiritual character which He would exhibit. It has even been found difficult, in the third chapter of St. John, recording the sequel of the interview with Nicodemus, to distinguish the point at which the language of the Baptist, describing our Lord's office, ceases, and that of the Evangelist, writing with the full knowledge of the Christian revelation, begins. So profound was the Baptist's penetration into the character and office of the Messiah. With this penetration, he cannot but have dwelt earnestly with his disciples upon the foreshadowing of the Messiah's office in the Old Testament Scriptures, and have thus brought their minds

and hearts into precisely the right condition for recognizing that character and that office when it came before them.

To understand the narrative, therefore, we must regard these disciples as having been brought by John's teaching into a state of the highest expectation, with their hearts softened and their eyes opened, prepared to recognize the Lord, for whom their whole nation had been waiting for so many centuries. When, then, according to the narrative, the Baptist, looking upon Jesus as He walked, said to them, "Behold the Lamb of God!" we may form some conception of the intense eagerness and expectation with which they followed Him. Their question, however, being perfectly neutral, indicates that they waited for our Lord to assert His own claims: "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" and our Lord's answer, "Come and see," seems to bid them come with true hearts to judge for themselves. One day's intercourse with our Lord, to minds thus prepared, suffices to convince them of the truth of John's declaration, and to

make them invite Peter to follow their example with the confident statement, "We have found the Messiah." Then our Lord's immediate address to Peter, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone," illustrates one of the means by which His influence was established over the minds of these disciples. It is an intimation of Peter's character and future work, and shows how men who approached our Lord felt, as it were, a master hand laid on them, their character penetrated, and their duty at once opened to them. The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and found Philip, and said unto him, "Follow Me." Nothing else is recorded of His words to Philip, but it is added that Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter, and, therefore, under the same influences as they; but the effect is the same. "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph."

Nathanael's answer shows that he was not disposed to accept such an intimation without inquiry. "Can there," he asks, "any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip replies, as our Lord had done, "Come and see." Then follows another instance of the method by which our Lord established His influence. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael, startled by this authoritative recognition of his character, said unto Him, "Whence knowest Thou me?" "Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." There seems a general consent of commentators that, in accordance with the habits of the Jews, our Lord here refers to some moment when Nathanael had been meditating upon what Moses in the law and the prophets did write—exercised, doubtless under John's influence, by the prevalent expectation of the Messiah, and marvelling when the Consolation of Israel was to come. The incident indicates

that our Lord read his inmost thoughts ; and accordingly, as though touched in the deepest springs of his life, he at once exclaims, " Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel." On this acceptance of Him, our Lord rejoins at once, in words which may well open to us something of the secret of His conversation with the other disciples whom He had previously attached to Himself, " Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." He asserted, that is, that He was the Son of man who had come from heaven, and on whom the mightiest of all heavenly influences would rest ; and the authority with which He spoke, and the whole tenor of His words, brought home to these disciples the conviction of the truth of His claims.

Slight, therefore, as is this sketch, and

surprising as may at first sight seem the suddenness of the conviction produced in the minds of the disciples, there are sufficient indications of the method by which the conviction was produced, and enough to justify its production. Taught by John to realize that they are at that crisis of the Jewish history when the Messiah is about to appear, pointed by the Baptist to Jesus Himself as that Messiah, they follow Him to judge for themselves; and they are immediately addressed, in a tone of authority, by words which penetrate to their inmost consciences, which unveil a knowledge of their secret thoughts, which lay bare their characters, which seem to tell them what they were meant for, and what their work may be in the world; and this is combined with the loftiest of claims, uttered by lips which are full of grace and truth. What wonder that they immediately succumb, as it were, to this Divine spiritual influence, and at once exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel"! The scene may

remind us of an incident in the patriarchal history, when Jacob wrestles with an angel until the break of day, but the angel suddenly touches a sinew, and the patriarch is instantly overcome. Our Lord's words seem to touch the secret sinews of spiritual and moral life in these disciples, and they instantly yield before Him. There seems no argument, and there is as yet no miracle. Our Lord's presence, and the grace and truth, combined with the authority, which breathe from His lips, are sufficient to convince them, and they become His disciples.

But this influence, overpowering as it was, is not deemed by our Lord Himself sufficient. The miracle of Cana in Galilee immediately follows, as if to confirm and clench the conviction previously wrought. The third day, immediately after our Lord had returned to Galilee, He vouchsafes a further manifestation of His glory, of a miraculous kind. As with all our Lord's miracles, there is nothing ostentatious about it ; and it may be that the check which He

gives to His mother's earnestness is connected with this intention to work the miracle quietly, for the conviction of His followers, and not in a manner to produce a startling effect on the whole company. But He avails Himself, as usual, of an opportunity which occurs in the natural course of events, just as the great miracle of the multiplying of loaves and fishes was wrought, not for the sole purpose of a great display of power, but from the simple benevolent motive of relieving the hunger and faintness of the multitude. An occasion arises when He can do a gracious and bounteous act, and at the same time give a pledge to His newly attached disciples that He possesses the power which He has claimed in His private intercourse with them. They are in the spirit of devout belief which we have been considering. They are convinced by His moral and spiritual claims, and by the evidence He had given of power over their hearts, that He is the Son of God, the Son of man, the King of Israel. But if He really

held these offices, if He had thus descended from heaven, and was endued with that Divine power which He claimed, it was to be expected that He would give some evidence of such power by exhibiting His command over nature, and His supernatural gifts. Our Lord, therefore, allows His supernatural power to flash forth, as it were, for a moment, not for His own sake, nor as the sole and sufficient evidence of His mission, but as its natural and necessary confirmation. He loses no time, so to say, in giving these true hearts a visible pledge of the claims which they had already recognized, and in strengthening their belief by a sign from heaven. It will thus be seen, if we consider this miracle in the light of all that had gone before, that its force of conviction depends on its connection with the evidence which had preceded it. The moral and spiritual basis for the belief of the disciples had been already laid; they were in the attitude of faith; the elements of full conviction were at work in their minds, ready

to be fused, so to speak, into one harmonious belief by a flash from heaven. That flash is vouchsafed. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory ; and His disciples believed on Him."

In the further consideration of the events of our Lord's ministry, this opening narrative of His self-revelation to His disciples, and the effect which it produced, will be found to be of deep significance ; but I will at present conclude by indicating briefly the light which it throws on the true basis of our own faith, and the manner in which that faith must be maintained. It will have been seen that the order of our Lord's revelation of Himself to His disciples begins from the moral and spiritual side. As it was necessary for the Baptist to prepare His way by leading the people to repentance, so it was requisite to lay the foundation of full belief in our Lord as the Messiah in an apprehension of His spiritual claim over men's hearts. When the hearts of men are in a true condition,

when they are opened to a sense of their need, of the necessity for themselves and their fellows of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King, of One who in all those capacities can be their Saviour, then they are prepared to listen to that Divine voice which is heard in the Gospels, speaking to them as quietly and gently, though with the same tone of authority, as our Lord addressed in this instance His first disciples. It is natural that they should accept that claim. It needs no elaborate argument. "As the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," so the heart of man, when not perverted, when sensible of its true needs, knows at once the voice of its Lord and Saviour; and it is right that it should instantly yield to Him. Yet it cannot but crave, in the midst of its dangers and necessities, amidst the signs all around it of the feebleness of mere mortal flesh, for some evidence that the voice which has thus laid so firm a hold on its conscience is the voice of One with more than mortal, with Divine, power, able

to stretch forth a right hand to help and defend it, to support it not only in life, but in death—the voice, in short, of the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining. It is this complementary evidence which is afforded by the miracles; and they are wrought accordingly for that purpose, sometimes with the most generous profusion. It was not the method of our Lord in the Gospels to extort allegiance by manifestation of superhuman force. He would give no signs to an evil and adulterous generation; but when the heart was open to Him, and the elements of faith were there, He vouchsafed that evidence of Divine power which was necessary to the completeness of His revelation. By that method, through the silent influence of the Gospels, has He commanded the faith of all subsequent generations of Christians, and does He command it still. Not by mere argument in the first instance, nor by miracles in the first instance, but by that spiritual authority which is manifested throughout the Gospels, does He penetrate into true and

honest hearts; and by the miracles, which are recorded side by side with those Divine words, does He quicken and strengthen their faith, until, in the full sense of the expression, they believe on Him. Let us, then, if we would realise the full blessing of such a faith, live with Him day by day in the Gospels, reading them not merely for the particular instruction which they convey, but as a means of enabling us to live in communion with that Divine Lord whose voice, and words, and acts drew to Him, in the manner we have been contemplating, His first disciples, compelling them to exclaim, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."



OUR LORD'S CREDENTIALS.

"Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world."—ST. JOHN vi. 14.

IX.

OUR LORD'S CREDENTIALS.

FROM the fact that this is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists, we cannot but conclude that it is one of the most important passages in our Lord's ministry, and our especial attention is due to the effect which it produced on those who witnessed it, as recorded in the text. It evidently points us to one of the features of our Lord's ministry which made the deepest impression on simple and unprejudiced hearts, and which brought home to them with peculiar force and clearness the conviction of His Divine mission. Such a conviction was the natural result of the miracle, or rather, to keep to the meaning of the original word in this instance, of the

"sign" which had been witnessed; and our Lord, in the discourse which follows, treats it as a sign, and founds on it some of His most lofty teaching. We shall do well, therefore, to endeavour to realize with distinctness what there was in this particular miracle or sign which was fitted, as it would seem in a peculiar degree, to evoke the faith expressed in the text.

With this view, it is important to bear in mind the evidence which was afforded, not merely by the miracle itself, but by the whole incident of which it forms a part, of the character as well as the power of our Lord. It is not a mere isolated marvel, wrought for the purpose of exhibiting His power and impressing His claims on the people. It is the conclusion of a series of characteristic transactions, and is wrought for an immediate purpose of the most natural and simple kind. Our Lord had attracted a great multitude to follow Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. We learn from the other

Evangelists that He yielded at once to their appeal, and devoted Himself the whole day to works and words of mercy among them. "He received them," says St. Luke, "and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing;" and it was not until the day began to wear away, or, as St. Matthew and St. Mark say, when it was evening, and the day now far spent, that the twelve began to be perplexed how such a mass of people were to be fed in such a desert place, and suggested that they should be sent away to buy themselves victuals. Then it was that our Lord's compassion was aroused, lest perchance, as He said on another similar occasion, they might faint by the way, for divers of them came from afar. On that consideration, and with this simple purpose of mercy in view, He works the wonderful miracle which has received, in so significant a manner, the attestation of all four Evangelists. By His mere will, He multiplies five loaves and two small fishes into sufficient and to spare for

the whole multitude. It was when those men saw this sign that they exclaimed, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." But bearing in mind the circumstances just mentioned, it will be seen that the miracle was fitted to produce this effect, not merely in itself, and by virtue of its own marvel, but as the culminating point in our Lord's gracious revelation of His will and power to the crowds who were then gathered round Him. He had been working miracles of mercy upon them, in body and soul, the whole day long; He had been proclaiming to them the gracious message of the kingdom of God, and had been relieving their physical sufferings; and now, at the last, He exerts His Divine power in order to relieve the simplest and commonest of their wants. There appears a singular touch of Divine compassion in the very fact that so great a miracle is wrought for so ordinary, and, as the disciples themselves seem to have thought, so unnecessary a result. "Send them away," they had said,

“that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food.” But at this point, if we may presume to say so, the gracious heart of the Saviour seemed to yield without hesitation to its compassionate impulses, and He would permit no physical imperfection—no physical laws, if you will—to stand in the way of His mercy and bounty. He would show not merely that He wields all the powers of nature at His will, but that His wish is to wield them for the relief of all human suffering and necessity, and that if He could give full play to His inclination He would satisfy at a word all human wants, from the highest spiritual need to the commonest physical hunger.

That the multitude were justified in drawing the conclusion stated in the text from this display of our Lord's power and will, is plain from the fact that, on another occasion, in reply to John the Baptist, our Lord adduces a precisely similar evidence of His being the Messiah, the “Prophet that should come into the world.” In answer to the

Baptist's question, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." These unbounded manifestations of combined benevolence and power belonged to our Lord's primary credentials—not the mere power in itself, but unlimited power employed for merciful ends, to extirpate human evils and to relieve human sufferings. Our Lord comes forward in the midst of a suffering and sinful world, and proclaims Himself its Saviour; and He gives the only evidence that could be adequate to such a proclamation—the evidence of fact. He not merely illumines men's minds and softens their hearts, but bestows upon them, in body and soul, the powers they need. It was a revelation, to the very eyes of mankind, of unbounded benevolence and love, unrestricted in its

exercise by any of the ordinary limitations of nature. That is the character in which He wishes men to apprehend Him, and in which he claims their obedience and their love. He brings them a Gospel, a message of unqualified good news; He reveals a kingdom of heaven, a kingdom infinitely superior, in its treasures, its powers, and its beauty, to the natural realms in which their lot has hitherto been cast; He offers them a Divine Spirit, who is able to regenerate their inmost natures; and what He asks them to do is to accept these infinite blessings.

There is, indeed, one limitation on which He uniformly insists, alike by teaching and by example. He warns them that the physical and material blessings He offers cannot permanently be bestowed on them independently of the moral and spiritual blessings which He calls upon them to seek, and that it is only through the latter that they can rely on attaining the former. For example, in applying the miracle of the text in His subsequent discourse, while He urges

it as an illustration of the essential character of His mission, He insists with not less urgency on the truth that the blessings to be sought chiefly, and in the first instance, are spiritual, and not physical. The miracle was intended, He says, to teach them that He could give them the true Bread from heaven. He said unto them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." That infinite bounty and infinite power which the miracle had exhibited did abide in Him, and should be exercised for the benefit of all who trusted in Him. But at the same time He said, "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you."

In accordance with this principle, no sooner has our Lord's mercy and power been evoked by such a scene as we have been

considering, no sooner have the springs of His Divine bounty been induced to overflow into some overwhelming marvel of Divine grace, than He seems to feel the necessity of closing them again, lest men should misunderstand His mission and His method, and should follow Him simply for the meat that perisheth. These physical miracles were chiefly to serve the purpose of awakening in their souls the feeling of unbounded trust in Him for their spiritual necessities; and their physical wants were afterwards to be supplied by the natural operation of spiritual, moral, and physical laws. They were to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things should be added unto them; the physical miracles were chiefly wrought as a pledge of this promise, and to induce them to seek that spiritual kingdom. That Divine economy, therefore, by which miraculous manifestations, such as miraculous cures, have been removed from the Church since the time of the Apostles, is in perfect harmony with our

Lord's own conduct in the matter, when He was upon earth. He Himself withdrew them, in the course of His own ministry, when they had been wrought sufficiently for their general moral purpose, lest the minds of men should be misdirected to seek for the relief of their miseries in physical, rather than in moral, regeneration. He permitted, as it were, flashes of light to gleam from heaven, revealing the hand and arm of the Lord, and giving assurance of their power, and of the gracious purpose He had in view, and then He threw the veil over them again, lest men should seek for the real powers of the kingdom of God elsewhere than in their own souls.

But while it is essential for us thus to bear in mind the complete subordination of physical to moral influences in our Lord's teaching and method, it remains none the less true that the main characteristic of our Lord's revelation of Himself was justly apprehended by the multitude, whose exclamation is recorded in the text; and that

this characteristic is that of infinite bounty, supported by infinite power. He does not come to men solely or mainly as a legislator, calling on them simply by arduous exertions to qualify themselves for His favour and His kingdom; but He comes offering to bestow on them everything they need; everything, however, in its right and due order. Not everything at once. Not the immediate removal of all their difficulties, sufferings, weaknesses, and sorrows. Those He expects them to endure patiently, in the course of His government and discipline; just as He did not shrink from enduring them Himself, but submitted to them in a more bitter and intense degree than can ever fall to the lot of His servants. But in due order; first, all spiritual and moral blessings, and then the gradual removal of human suffering and sorrow here, and perfect happiness hereafter. But those spiritual blessings He offers at once, without reserve, to every soul that will accept them from Him. The first step

in His message, and in that of His Apostles, is absolute forgiveness for past sins, and reception into the complete favour and love of God. He makes no stipulation in the first instance; He simply says, "Go, and sin no more." Like the father in the parable, He receives the prodigal son with open arms, the moment he is impelled by the sense of his necessities to return to his home. All He asks is trust and love in the future, and He is prepared to open all the treasures of His spiritual store, to render that trust and love ever deeper and surer. When He reveals, as in the Sermon on the Mount, vast heights of spiritual and moral graces at which the soul of man is designed to aim, He does not do it as one who is exacting some hard task from us. He proclaims, indeed, that without them a man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. He declares that except men transcended the highest conceptions of righteousness which were current at their time, they could in no case enter into that kingdom. He tells them

that the gate is strait and the way is narrow which leadeth unto life. But at the same time He assures them of Divine aid to produce these graces in their souls, and to give them the righteousness which they need. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. . . . If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" It is that promise, and that only, which renders the Sermon on the Mount part of the message of the Gospel, and not a message of despair. If it were set before us as the standard we must attain, by our own exertions, before we could enter the kingdom of heaven, who could be otherwise than dismayed? But regard it as throughout a revelation of the Divine graces which are promised to our faithful and loving efforts,

and then the weaker and the more sinful the soul, the greater is the blessing which those descriptions of spiritual beauty reveal.

It is striking that at a season like Advent, which speaks to us of judgment, and warns us of the inexorable character of the Divine righteousness, the Church should at the same time urge so prominently on our attention, on more than one occasion, this gracious character of the Gospel message. It is as though, at the same time as she was reminding us of our Lord's character as a Judge, she desired to make us remember, as the only truth which can support us under that revelation, that He is also a Saviour. It is probably in this latter capacity that we chiefly fail to realize Him. Influences have never been wanting, and are least of all wanting now, to impress upon us the absolute necessity of conformity to God's laws for our happiness and welfare in body and soul ; but the other revelation, which alone makes this tolerable, is too often sadly wanting. Strange to say, men sometimes shrink from the full realization

of the blessedness of the Gospel in this respect, as though it weakened the force of its proclamation of judgment. Free forgiveness, antecedent to any merits on our own part, the unbounded offer of grace and power—these seem sometimes too much to be believed; and it is even urged, as it was in St. Paul's day, that it is giving men a dangerous licence to dwell too much on the free offers of the Gospel. No doubt there is a danger in any such proclamation. Any great truth may be abused, and the greatest truths most of all. But, on the whole, it has been proved by experience that in these unrestricted and unbounded assurances the Gospel is better adapted to the real character of the human heart than more cautious and more reserved teaching. It has, after all, appealed to that which is the strongest force of human nature—that of trust and love. As a rule, which method of education would be judged by those who best know the world to be the most likely to be effectual—one of jealousy, and distrust, and strict requirement,

or one of generosity and trust? There are no doubt some natures who will abuse the latter system; but, on the whole, those who exert the best influence over their fellows, whether young or old, are those who trust them the most, who give them the most, and who appeal to their generosity rather than to their fears.

Such accordingly has been, as a rule, the method of the Divine dispensation throughout. The law itself, stern as it was, was based on promises, and God never exacted anything from mankind for which He did not give them adequate power, and assure them of an abundant reward. But in the Gospel, if we may so say, He has thrown off all reserve, and approaches men in an attitude of unbounded generosity. He offers them everything; He gives them His Son, His Spirit, and all the treasures of His grace, and instead of merely calling on them to obey under peril of punishment, invites them to come to Him by the assurance of infinite blessings. Can it really be due to anything

but a failure to realize the nature of this message that men hesitate to accept it? At least, if we examine our own hearts, we shall probably find that the weakness and hesitation in our moral life have in great measure arisen from the sense of the self-denying aspect of duty being for the moment paramount over the sense of the blessedness to which it invites us, and of the power at our disposal for the performance of it; and if we would attain full energy in our Christian course it behoves us to grasp the gracious conception which this miracle exhibits, and to realize that our Lord comes before us, not to exact from us, but to bestow upon us, all the grace, all the truth, all the righteousness for which our souls are fitted. Let us realize Him in this character; let us live with Him in conscious trust and prayer; let us ask Him, with honest and earnest hearts, to give us the aid we need; and we shall certainly find that He is as near to us now in the spirit as He was then in the flesh to the multitudes whom He relieved. Physical miracles we may not now expect, but

works of supernatural grace, the regeneration of lost souls, and the invigoration of feeble ones—these have been exhibited in all ages of the Church, and are daily witnessed among us; and they should elicit from our hearts the grateful and trustful exclamation “This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.”

THE GOSPEL OF MIRACLES.

"And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain : and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him : and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit."—ST. MATT. iv. 25 ; v. 1-3.

X.

THE GOSPEL OF MIRACLES.

THESE verses are the connecting-link of a passage in which St. Matthew affords us a summary view of the character of our Lord's ministry in Galilee. Immediately after the miracle of Cana in Galilee, and the manifestation of His glory in word and deed to His immediate disciples, He proceeded to open His mission in Jerusalem by cleansing the Temple, and displaying His power to the people by various signs. But this appears to have provoked at once such a display of hostility from the ruling classes, that notwithstanding many believed on His name when they saw the miracles which He did, yet, as St. John says, He did not commit Himself unto them. He could not as yet

trust their allegiance, and He was reluctant to provoke further resistance. The crisis of His ministry, the great tragedy in which it culminated, might, to all appearance, have been precipitated unduly, had He continued to confront the full force of Jewish prejudice in the Holy City, where that prejudice was concentrated. It was partly in mercy that He for a while withdrew, thus affording time to the ruling classes to understand His message, if they would, and to repent and accept it. He was also able in Galilee, among a simpler people, and where He was less directly in conflict with those whom St. John designates emphatically as "the Jews," to develop the full character of His mission. It is in Galilee, accordingly, that we may best study the character of that ministry in its most general aspect; and thus the first three Gospels mainly confine themselves to an account of His work there, reserving the description of His work in Judæa to the time of His final conflict. St. John supplements their accounts by describing the Judæan

ministry, and in this circumstance is to be found the sufficient explanation of such differences as have been observed between the two records, and particularly between the characteristics of the discourses of our Lord in St. John and in the other Evangelists. The discourses were for the most part delivered to different classes, for different purposes, and it is only appropriate and necessary that there should be a difference between them.

In our consideration, then, in these meditations, of some central points of our Lord's ministry we now turn to His ministry in Galilee, and we find its general characteristics summarized in the last three verses of the fourth chapter of St. Matthew. "Jesus," we are told, "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed

with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people . from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain," and there delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

This brief description indicates two essential points in our Lord's ministry, and at the same time connects them intimately together. It is a description, first, of His acts, and, secondly, of His words. With respect, in the first place, to His acts, it is to be observed that they are depicted as consisting in an overwhelming exhibition of miraculous powers for the relief of all the suffering that was brought before Him. He went about healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. They brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and He healed them, and, as a consequence, great multitudes followed Him from all parts of the

country. Now, this description exhibits our Lord's miracles in a very striking light, and one which has of late been too often obscured. It exhibits them, during considerable periods of His Ministry, not as an occasional or rare exercise of power, but as one which was habitual and unrestrained. There are various other passages in the Gospels which explicitly state, and many which intimate, the same characteristic. Thus, in the tenth verse of the third chapter of St. Mark we read that "He had healed many, inasmuch that they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as many as had plagues." At the end of the sixth chapter of the same Gospel we are told that "whithersoever He entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment; and as many as touched Him were made whole." St. John's brief reference to the signs which He did in Jerusalem at His first visit there, and the expression of Nicodemus, "No man can do

these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him," point to the same fact; and it is perhaps still more strikingly stated in the thirtieth verse of the fifteenth chapter of St. Matthew. "Great multitudes," we are told, "came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel."

That which is exhibited in such descriptions is an unlimited and, it would sometimes seem, irrepressible exercise of supernatural powers of mercy in the relief of all human suffering. In this respect alone the miraculous action of our Lord is essentially distinguished from all previous manifestations in the persons of the prophets, and is only paralleled by that which was at first exercised by the Apostles in His name after the descent of the Holy Spirit. From the latter

it is distinguished by the fact that it is exercised by His own power and authority, whereas the Apostles expressly declare that the powers exercised through them were His. But in other cases, even in the Scriptures, what is exhibited is some particular miracle, wrought for some special purpose; here it is an unbounded display of omnipotence, wrought for the general purpose of relieving the plagues of humanity. Some miracles, indeed, which appear to have a particular purpose and significance, are related by the Evangelists in detail, but these form a mere specimen, an infinitesimal part we might almost say, of the whole. We may even say that from the moment when He assumes His ministry, such miraculous works were often His natural and normal action. As St. Luke expresses it, in the sixth chapter, at the nineteenth verse, "the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all." This miraculous and healing virtue was inherent in Him, and was effectual for

the relief of every misery that came in contact with it. Even such a miracle as the multiplying of the loaves and fishes appears to arise easily and naturally, as it were, from this superabundant power of relieving all human necessities. Whatever its moral purpose, the immediate motive of the feeding of the four thousand, as described by the Evangelist, was the simple relief of the people when they were hungering and fainting after being with Him three days. "I have compassion," He said, "on the multitude, because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." So long as the appointed period of His ministry lasted, the characteristic in question is not that He works occasional miracles, however numerous, for special objects beyond the immediate necessities of the moment, to prove His doctrines, or simply to convey some striking lesson; but that His Divine compassion is continually acting with Divine power, to bring relief to all the miseries around Him.

This aspect of our Lord's miracles would seem of the highest importance, first in respect of the evidence for the miracles themselves, and secondly in the illustration they afford of His character and mission. As to the miracles themselves, it will be seen that that which has to be accounted for is not a limited number of miraculous occurrences, but an innumerable series of them, exercised on every form of human evil. This is the testimony of eye-witnesses, repeated explicitly, and not less clearly implied in the whole tone of the narrative. It is well known that persistent attempts have been made to minimize the miraculous manifestations recorded in the Gospels, and particularly to show that certain miracles might be explained by the supposition of some natural causes acting with unusual force, or in a manner beyond the ordinary comprehension of the observers; and one famous rationalistic scheme, that of Paulus, which marks, indeed, the commencement of the main rationalistic movement of this

century, endeavoured by this minimizing process to bring the whole Gospel narrative within the limits of ordinary experience. Though the attempt was soon seen to be hopeless by German critics, who consequently resorted to bolder negative hypotheses, it still lingers in some forms of speculation around us; and it is supposed that the veracity of the Evangelists can be maintained consistently with an attempt to explain away the miracles, or at least to explain them down to the lowest possible point. But such efforts fail to deal with the most characteristic element of these miraculous narratives. The essential point of the story is not that particular miracles were wrought, but that an innumerable multitude of them were wrought, and that the most striking feature in our Lord's action was the continual exercise of this miraculous power.

This consideration renders it, moreover, far more difficult to contest the trustworthiness of the Evangelists' reports. Had they only narrated a few miracles, it might have been

argued in detail that they were misinformed, and were not corrected at the time because the evidence on such details could not be sifted. But what they narrate is a broad fact, open to general observation, and constituting the most prominent feature of our Lord's action. It is difficult to conceive that any writers, at all within the range of contemporary evidence, would presume to state as the most open and public feature of our Lord's ministry a characteristic by which in reality it was never marked, and which would have been inconsistent, not merely with the evidence of particular witnesses, but with the total impression subsisting in the Jewish nation respecting our Lord's work. There is, however, no attempt, in any writer near the time, to deny that that ministry had this general character. It was a feature fully recognized in it; and whether He were rejected or not, whatever explanation was given of His nature and office, the general impression stated by Nicodemus was in

practice universally admitted, "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."

But the most important conclusion to be drawn from this aspect of our Lord's ministerial work is that which relates to His own character. This manifestation affords a simple and broad foundation for our belief in His Divine nature. It harmonizes with every other manifestation of Him in word and deed, whether to His disciples when He first called them, or to the world at large. It exhibits Him as displaying an unprecedented and unapproached command over all the forces of nature, and manifesting all around Him a supernatural glory. In spite of His inheritance of our mortal frame, and His submission in His own person to the various weaknesses and sufferings of our lot, He nevertheless, at certain periods of His ministry, manifests, wherever He goes, and on whatever occasion He appears, a light, a glory, and a power which transcend the utmost conception

of human capacity, and naturally produce that conviction which St. John expresses in the words, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." If we would realize His work, and depict Him to our minds and hearts as He moved among men, we must not confine our attention to His teaching, nor be content only to be astonished, like those who heard the Sermon on the Mount, by the authority with which He spoke. We should miss the main facts of His manifestation if we contemplated Him mainly as a Teacher. What we have to realize is the appearance of an infinitely gracious Being, full indeed of words and looks of infinite truth and penetration, but at the same time clothed about, as it were, with a supernatural radiance, who had a virtue of benevolent omnipotence continually streaming from Him, and who seemed sometimes unable, if we may use such an expression for the purpose of illustration, to restrain the action of this ineffable grace. To touch the hem of His garment is enough

to restore the sick to health, and He diffuses around Him, like the sun in his strength, an atmosphere of light and splendour. From this point of view it would appear that the evidence of our Lord's Divine nature was not at the time, and is not now, so much dependent on argument as on direct perception. Men have in their minds an inherent conception of what the character of God must be. As, in the words of the prophet, "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," so the heart of man, if it be not self-hardened, knows the God who is its Father and its Lord, when manifested to it. When One appeared, therefore, among men, who knew all things and could do all things, and who did them for ends of mercy and grace, their hearts bowed before Him instinctively; and they bow still before the records of the same manifestation.

The Psalmist, for instance, describes one aspect of the Divine nature where he exclaims, "Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me; Thou knowest my downsitting

and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off . . . , for there is not a word in my tongue but, lo, O Lord, Thou, knowest it altogether;" and it was the exhibition of this power of reading those inmost secrets of the conscience, which no human being can read, and which a man scarcely knows himself, which induced Nathanael to exclaim, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel," and which extorted from the Samaritan woman the confession, "Come, see a Man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" But another aspect of the Divine nature was described by the Psalmist in the words, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: . . . which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. . . . The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous." This was the

character in which our Saviour manifested Himself by the miraculous action we have been contemplating; and this accordingly, by its correspondence with the loftiest conceptions of the Divine character, similarly reveals to men their Lord and their God.

It is necessary, indeed, to bear in mind the relation of this miraculous manifestation to our Lord's teaching. It is interpreted by that teaching, and its direct and indirect instruction cannot be fully understood except in the light thus cast upon it. Great problems, moreover, are raised at once by its exhibition and by its subsequent reserve and withdrawal, of which that teaching offers the only explanation. But meanwhile, one of the most blessed aspects of our faith as Christians is brought before us by the reflection that in surrendering ourselves to Christ as our Lord and Master, we surrender ourselves to One who showed in His most characteristic acts, when He was upon earth, that He is our Saviour; that He came to bind up the broken-hearted, to preach recovering of sight

to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised ; that "He is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining ;" and that His power is prompted in its exercise by infinite compassion and love. Though withdrawn from our sight, and for the present veiling His miraculous influence, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; and He asks us to submit to Him, not only as our Master, our Teacher, and our Judge, but as One who, now by one means and now by another, sometimes by supernatural action, always by the gradual and gracious influence of His Spirit, is able and willing to help all that are oppressed with the devil. Let us not doubt that if we lay before Him the plagues of our own hearts, whatever they may be, His gracious power will be present with us ; and that, in proportion as we trust Him, He will grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations.

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING.

*"And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain :
and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him : and
He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are
the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*—

MATT. V. 1-3.

XI.

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING.

THESE words, as is evident, are intimately connected with the verses which precede them. There followed Him, we are told in the last verse of the fourth chapter, great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan; "and seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them." It is, moreover, plain that the sermon which follows was not delivered only to a select circle of disciples, but to the multitudes in question; for it is added at the end, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the

people"—or, in the original, "the multitudes"—"were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." It was therefore to the multitudes who had followed Him, and with reference to their circumstances, that He delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The first aspect of that sermon, accordingly, must be sought in reference to those circumstances. We must recall, then, the wonderful manifestation which had brought together this concourse around our Lord. He had gone "about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people," until His fame had spread throughout all Syria; "and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them;" and so it was that there followed Him great multitudes of

people from all parts of the country. It was not merely that a certain number of striking and characteristic miracles were wrought, such as are afterwards mentioned in detail, but that an unbounded virtue went forth from our Lord to relieve every form of misery that was brought before Him. It extended from the most deadly diseases of men to their simplest wants, until He condescended on one occasion to work one of His greatest miracles for the simple purpose, so far as the immediate occasion was concerned, of relieving the hunger and faintness of those who had been listening to Him. The fame of Him which went abroad throughout all Syria was the fame of a power which has never been seen before or since—an absolutely unrestricted command of all the forces of nature, for the purpose of driving away the evils by which men were overwhelmed. No wonder that great multitudes followed Him, and that suffering men and women flocked to Him from all parts of the country to be healed of their plagues!

If we bear these circumstances in mind, the first word of the Sermon on the Mount seems at once to raise before us the central feature of the scene, and to illustrate, with the utmost vividness, the expectations with which our Lord was followed. He opened His mouth, and the first word He uttered was of blessing. "Blessed," He said, "are the poor in spirit;" and the same word is nine times reiterated. Must it not have fallen on the eager ears of that multitude like rain upon the thirsty ground? Before our Lord were multitudes of struggling and suffering men and women, taken with divers diseases and torments, craving for deliverance from their plagues; many of them, as appears from the sequel, still waiting to approach and to obtain immediate relief; all of them, it must needs be, sensible that that immediate relief did not remove from them all the dangers and sorrows to which they were liable, and most assuredly not relieved by such physical miracles from the plagues of their own hearts. If we would appreciate

the scene, we may well imagine a crowd of eager faces, hungering and thirsting for further manifestations of the marvellous mercy and benevolence which they had already experienced. An immense expectation had been aroused in their souls—an expectation of unlimited deliverance and unstinted bounty. The gates of the kingdom of heaven had, as it were, been thrown open, and the King had appeared, scattering His largesses among the crowds which awaited His approach. The first word He uttered, therefore, in this sermon answered to the very expectation which had been awakened. They came in multitudes, looking for blessing; and when He opened His mouth, the word *Blessed* was the first they heard. With what redoubled eagerness may we not imagine them awaiting the words which followed! The King of the kingdom of heaven, who had just shown, by His astonishing miracles, that He was able to give blessing, proclaimed that they were to be blessed, and that their hearts' desire was to be fulfilled. How was

the blessing to be conferred, and upon whom?

With what force do not these circumstances invest the declarations which follow! Our Lord, indeed, proceeds with reiterated assurances of blessing; but He declares at the same time that these blessings, the blessings of His kingdom, are only to be obtained through endurance of the very sorrows and sufferings from which the multitudes may have hoped that they were to be delivered. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . . Blessed are they that mourn. . . . Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake." They must be content with poverty of spirit, with continued mourning, with meek endurance of suffering, with reviling, and persecution, and all manner of slander, with the same kind of cruel lot as had befallen the prophets of old time. Vast as were the powers of the kingdom of heaven, and the blessings of that kingdom, He did not come to relieve them of the burden which the best men had borne

in past times; but He called upon them, on the contrary, for a continued and patient endurance of similar persecutions. The whole tone of the sermon, in respect of its demand upon His disciples, is of precisely the same character. Throughout, from first to last, He enforces the severest conditions on His followers—conditions far more severe than those of the old Law, and far more than were fulfilled by its strictest teachers and observers at that day. “I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,” the highest representatives of strict legal observance, “ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” They are called upon to treat their inclinations with a severity which can only be compared to plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand. They must abandon all assertion of their rights for their own interests. They must seek for, and they must expect, no reward from men. They must not be concerned to lay up

treasure upon earth, but must be content to lay up treasure in heaven. In a word, they must enter in at the strait gate, remembering that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." It might have seemed to them, as has just been said, that a King of such unbounded powers as His miracles had exhibited might have flung the gates of heaven open, for all that multitude to enter without effort; it might have seemed as though wide was the gate and broad was the way that led to its glories. But the fact, as declared at every point of the discourse, is precisely the reverse. "For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction;" but "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." Perhaps, moreover, this teaching receives a peculiar emphasis from the manner in which, at the outset, our Lord warns the people of the consequences of following Him. At least, they might naturally have thought, they were safe, and sure of nothing but

happiness, if they followed a Teacher and a King who had just exhibited such unbounded mercy and power in His miraculous relief of their diseases and torments. But against any such expectation He expressly warns them. He does not merely say, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake," but adds, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake;" as much as to say, "Be warned beforehand that, in following Me, you must expect something very different from those gifts of bounty and of healing which I have just bestowed on you: you must expect reviling, and persecution, and all manner of evil." What an amazing contrast between the expectation and the reality!

All this, moreover, receives a deeper and more touching significance if we bear in mind the spirit which had animated our Lord in His works of mercy. As has been recently observed by the Bishop of Durham, we fail to appreciate the nature of our Lord's

miraculous action if we regard Him as simply dispensing, from His bounty, the gifts of a kind of superfluous power. His miracles are depicted throughout the Gospels as flowing from an overwhelming sympathy with the sufferings which He encountered, and as sometimes almost extorted from Him, against an original intention, by the intensity with which such suffering is pressed upon His heart. The woman of Tyre and Sidon, for instance, almost wrests from Him the cure of her daughter, at a time when He had determined, for general reasons, to withdraw from public action; and in a similar manner His heart overflows to the hungry multitudes, and for their relief He works a miracle which His disciples seemed to think unnecessary. The spirit of His miracles is expressed by St. Matthew in the chapter which follows the Sermon on the Mount, when he says that "when the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: that it

might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." He took them all upon His heart, and in His love and in His pity He relieved them. It is not the voice, therefore, of a stern moralist merely which bids the disciples, at the moment they are expecting some vast outpouring of graciousness, to be prepared for suffering and persecution, to be content with poverty and sorrow, to brace themselves to sacrifice their right eyes and right hands, and to struggle through the strait and narrow gate. These are the utterances of One who has all their infirmities at heart, and has taken all their weaknesses on Himself, and who would relieve them all if He could, or rather if it were consistent with their real welfare. Even in those warnings there is the voice of true sympathy, knowing what the difficulties and struggles of human life must needs be, and warning men in mercy to be prepared for them. It was thus out of the profoundest sympathy with human weakness and sorrow

that, at the very moment when He had raised among the multitude who followed Him the highest expectations of the gifts He could bestow, He tells them that the bestowal of those gifts cannot be continued, and that they must be content to follow Him in humiliation, in weakness, and, it may be, in suffering.

✱ This was the grand paradox of our Lord's teaching, which the men of His day could not understand, and which led in great measure to His ultimate rejection. So it was at Nazareth that, when He could not consent to work the miracles of which they had heard elsewhere, they rose in indignation, and would have murdered Him in their disappointment. Such, in all probability, was the great disillusion which led to His betrayal, and to His rejection by the people at large. Instant relief by miraculous power they could understand; that was what they expected from a Divine King and Saviour, from One whose mission it was to proclaim and to bring blessing; and it seemed to them a mockery that, with these words on His lips, and these

manifestations of His power in acts of healing, He should hold His hand, and call on them for humiliation and suffering, to drink His bitter cup, and to be baptized with His baptism. The mystery of His ministry, and its great stumbling-block, consisted in this combination of unbounded power to relieve the miseries of mankind with the refusal to exercise it as a matter of course, and with the continued requirement that they should endure the circumstances of their lot. In this, I say, consisted its mystery and its stumbling-block then. But it has not less been its chief difficulty since, as it is one of the chief difficulties which men feel with respect to the whole Divine dispensation of the world. Men still ask why the Gospel has not fulfilled all its apparent promises of blessing to mankind ; and we are tempted to believe that there is no such Divine power at work around us as that of which the Saviour and His Apostles spoke. In the same way men point to the miseries and sufferings of the world at large, and ask whether they are consistent with the

belief in a God of all power and mercy. Our Saviour, standing in the midst of that eager crowd, with acts of supernatural power exercised by Him on the one hand, words of blessing proceeding from His lips, and at the same time, and in the same breath, bidding men prepare for humiliation, mourning, and persecution, affords in one vivid scene a miniature of the enduring condition of the world. The message of the Gospel essentially combines these two elements. It is a Gospel. Blessing, salvation, are the first sounds it utters; but it proceeds, in tones of uncompromising severity, to tell men that this blessing is ordinarily obtained through patient suffering, through the various forms of what men consider humiliation. The eager craving of mankind for instant deliverance from their troubles may be met in human schemes by promises of relief through some political legislation or social revolution. Our Lord's message is one of perfect blessing, but only to be reached by painful moral endurance, and not necessarily, in any individual case, to be

reached here at all. His ultimate and final promise is, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven."

When we bear in mind what has been said of the intense compassion and sympathy which prompted our Saviour's acts and words, we cannot but be assured that the law which He thus laid down is only enforced because it is essential to the full development of our nature, and to the complete realization of the blessings He desires to bestow on us. We may, indeed, imagine that it might have been possible to create the world anew, to abolish its dark past, and to establish a state of things into which no evil should ever enter. But, as Bishop Butler is perpetually reminding us, we know not the possibilities of things; and the fact before us, revealed in the whole method of the Gospel and the economy of the world, is that it would be inconsistent with its constitution that the evils we have brought upon ourselves should be removed, and the blessings God designs for us be wrought out, by any other than that gradual process which

prevails in all other spheres of His government. Blessing He desires for us, infinite and eternal; but it is His settled will to train us into the enjoyment of it, and to prepare our faculties gradually for its full realization. He will not abolish that primary constitution of human nature, that all its happiness depends on obedience to the moral and spiritual laws ordained for it, and that physical blessings can only be granted to moral and spiritual righteousness. It was not a theologian, but a president of the Royal Society, who said not long ago, with reference to the improvement of the condition of the poor, that "it would be of no avail to improve them from the outside alone, unless you could improve them from the inside also." This primary law of our nature is reasserted by our Lord; but the Gospel He brings involves, first, the assurance—the assurance of One who evidently has the gift of all grace in His hands—that full and abundant blessing shall certainly be conferred upon those who patiently submit to the discipline ordained for them by their

Father in heaven, and who seek, through whatever sufferings, to carry out His will; and, secondly, that He will give them the supernatural aid of His Holy Spirit to support them in their arduous struggle. They are not, and will never be, left to themselves; but if they, evil though they be, give good gifts to their children, their Father in heaven will assuredly give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Blessings infinitely beyond the physical bounty which He displayed are reserved in heaven for them, and He is with them now, to give them His peace and His strength in their present trials.

Such, as illustrated in this passage, is the central message of our Saviour's teaching. How it has penetrated into human hearts from those lips of truth we well know. But is it too much to say, that even from Him such words might have been insufficient to persuade men to trust Him in a course so contrary to their natural inclinations, if He had not given them the further assurance of His own example, alike in His patient submission to the

same humiliation for which He called on them, and in His entrance on the joy which was set before Him as the reward of His Cross? Such at least seems the suggestion of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who does not hesitate to say that "it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." At least, by setting us this example, He has rendered it our privilege to sum up the message we have been considering in the touching words of our Visitation Service: that "there should be no greater comfort to Christian persons, than to be made like unto Christ, by suffering patiently adversities, troubles, and sicknesses. For He Himself went not up to joy, but first He suffered pain; He entered not into His glory before He was crucified. So truly our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ; and our door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ; that we may rise again from death, and dwell with Him in everlasting life."

THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—
ST. MATT. v. 16.

XII.

THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL.

THE characteristic of the Sermon on the Mount which is perhaps most generally recognized is the loftiness of the ideal which it sets before us. It urges in various forms the pursuit of a standard of excellence beyond any that was recognized by those whom our Lord addressed, and embodying the highest possible conceptions. He takes the leading commandments in turn, and intensifies the meaning of each of them so as to penetrate to the most secret recesses of the heart. Whosoever, He says, shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be one of the least in the kingdom of heaven. His disciples are to attain an

excellence beyond that of all other men. He tells them that they are intended to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. They are like a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid; and their light is to shine before all men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. But the highest expression of this standard of excellence is afforded by the exhortations to imitate our Father which is in heaven. We are to love our enemies, that we may be the children of our Father in heaven; and finally we are to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect—perfect, even as He is perfect, who, we are told, is light, and in Whom is no darkness at all. To the inculcation of this standard and this aim the whole sermon seems devoted; and at its close our Lord warns us that its due attainment affords a practical test of our being His true disciples, and is the condition of our being acknowledged by Him in the day of judgment.

"By their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

It must be felt, the more we reflect on the character of these exhortations, and compare them with our experience, that this is an amazing demand. The Sermon on the Mount, regarded simply as the proclamation of this standard as the goal of human efforts, and as the sole condition of blessedness, cannot but carry with it something bewildering, if not distressing, to those who are sensible of their inherent weakness; and to those who are not so sensible, the proclamation of such a standard is not without its dangers. They may flatter themselves they approach it, when they are a very long way off; and to tell people that they are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, is a message which certainly has its perils for them. But we find such difficulties disappear if we observe the

motives which are set before men for the attainment of these excellences, and the conditions on which such exhortations are founded. They are all substantially contained in the text, which is one of the key-notes to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. "Let your light," says our Saviour, "so shine before men, that they may see your good works." Had the exhortation stopped there, it might have presented the difficulties just alluded to. But our Lord adds, "that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven." Let us notice the flood of light which is poured over our moral position by this addition. Why are men to be led, by the sight of Christians' good works, to glorify their Father in heaven? Obviously for one reason only; that those good works are, and are known to be, not their own good works, but the works of their Father in heaven. They are to be the light of the world, but not by virtue of their own light. They are lamps by which light is diffused; but the light itself is independent

of them, and is the sole source of their illumination. Their own good works are only mentioned in order to lead the thoughts of men, and their own thoughts, beyond them, and their own glory is thus absorbed in that of another, at the moment when it attains its highest point of excellence.

Now this consideration explains the order of the sermon, and enables us to apply all its lofty exhortations to ourselves. It commences by proclaiming blessedness to certain characters, and stating the particular kinds of blessedness for which they are qualified; and all of these are practically involved in the first,—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The words “poor in spirit” imply in the first place a sense of spiritual need, and a craving for its relief. They imply a conscious destitution of moral and spiritual excellence, and a conscious absence of power to attain it by one’s own exertions. The Greek word, in fact, implies more than poverty; it indicates the condition of one who has to beg for the

very necessities of life. Such as these, says our Lord, are admitted to the kingdom of heaven. That is the blessing which He came to give them. It is not that this character, by itself, constitutes blessedness, but that they are in the right attitude of mind for receiving blessedness, and that He will confer it on them. He is explaining the blessedness of that kingdom of heaven which He came to establish, and He declares that all its powers and privileges are bestowed on those who are sensible of their need, and who look to Him for its relief.

This is the general character, which is exemplified in detail in the subsequent Beatitudes. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Blessed, that is, are they who are sensible of their evil, above all of their spiritual evil, for I am come to bring them comfort, and to heal them from their diseases and sufferings. "Blessed are the meek"—not so much, in Scripture language, merely the gentle, but above all things those who, like Moses—in this sense called the

meekest man on earth—are sensible of their dependence on God ; whose humility is due to their apprehension of their own weakness on the one side and of His strength on the other, and who are never striving to assert themselves, but simply to carry out His will, under His guidance, with the aid of His Spirit. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” feeling it to be the very food of their souls, and conscious, at the same time, how destitute they are of it, and how unable to procure it. Blessed are they, says our Lord, for they shall be filled. I am come, that is, to supply their hunger and thirst, for “He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.” “Blessed,” again, “are the merciful,” those who are sensible of the need of others no less than of their own, and do what little in them lies to relieve it. They shall obtain mercy. They shall have done to themselves as they do to others ; their sins shall be forgiven, and their

necessities supplied. "Blessed are the pure in heart"—those whose souls are not pos-
sessed by passion, but who are still craving for the only vision by which they can be truly satisfied. Their souls are, as it were, empty, and incapable of being filled by anything of their own or of this world; and these shall see God. I am come to reveal Him to them, and to make them one with Him. The knowledge of God, and the love of God, shall be their portion here and hereafter. "Blessed are the peacemakers," those who are labouring to establish mutual kindness, love, and help, not to assert the dominion of the strong over the weak; "they shall be called the children of God;" for the work which they are doing is the same as that in which God and our Saviour love to be engaged, establishing peace on earth and good will towards men. "Blessed," again, "are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," and who do not defend themselves, but are content simply to do what is right, and to submit themselves to

Him that judgeth righteously, trusting, not in their own power to assert righteousness, but in His power and His will to do so in His own way.

Such is the general character of the Beatitudes. They may be said to be blessings on the receptive character. They declare, in the first place, that the true attitude of the human soul is to be sensible of its poverty, its blindness, its nakedness, its liability to yield to temptation, its need of help on all sides; and then they proclaim blessedness to those who are thus disposed, as being the great privilege of that kingdom of heaven which our Lord established. To poverty He brings riches, to sorrow He brings comfort, to meekness He brings strength, to hunger and thirst He brings an eternal spiritual food, to the blindness of nature He brings everlasting light. The Beatitudes are thus an explanation of the words of Isaiah, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." It would have been a mockery

to tell the poor, the mourning, the meek, and the persecuted to arise and shine by their own power and in their own light. But in the coming of our Saviour the glory of the Lord had risen upon them. The people who sat in darkness had seen a great light, and to them which sat in the region and gate of death, light had sprung up. This, accordingly, is the foundation of the exhortation in the text, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

We have, therefore, revealed to us in this verse, and in the general order of our Lord's exhortation, at once the means by which we can approach the standard He sets before us, and an effectual guarantee against any of the dangers which the setting up of such a standard might seem to involve. This sense of our absolute moral and spiritual dependence upon God ensures, in the first place, that aiming at absolute perfection in thought, as well as in word and deed, which

our Lord proceeds to inculcate. If we are to live as in the sight of an Almighty and all-knowing God, if the aim He proposes to us is to be perfect, we are forced to feel our imperfection at every moment and in every thought. Let a man's eyes be mainly fixed on the judgment of his fellows or of the world, let his standard be that which is determined by his own observation and his own conceptions, and he is, to say the least, under a grievous temptation to congratulate himself on imperfect acquirements, and to fail to realize the full perfection for which he was designed. But let him live as in God's presence, conscious, above all things, of his Father who seeth in secret, having before his soul continually the infinite perfections of Him to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid, and he can never fail to remain poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, meek and pure in heart.

It must surely be evident how supremely potent an instrument is thus provided for

the purification of the heart. It brings our finite acquirements, our little virtues, ever side by side with infinite and supreme excellence. It tells us that that excellence, and that perfection, exist, and were intended for us to imitate and to attain; and in proportion as this is realized must we be for ever mourning that we are so far off from it. Accordingly our Lord particularly points out how His teaching guards against the danger of self-righteousness. "Judge not," He says, "that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" A man cannot fail to be sensible of the beam in his own eye if he remembers the Divine Eye which is ever upon him, and he will then have no heart for judging his brother. He will be sensible that every censure he passes on another justifies a similar censure being passed on himself. To

judge others, moreover, implies that we are sensible, first of all, of the blame which they deserve; whereas he who considers his own heart, and the hearts of his fellows, from the point of view we have been contemplating, will be sensible, in the first place, of their weakness and his own, and of their common need of Divine help and illumination. In a word, an unlimited aim, combined with unlimited humility, the sense of the possession of the kingdom of heaven, combined with permanent and ever-growing poorness of spirit,—this is the character, and this the possibility, which our Lord's exhortations enable us to pursue, and ever more and more to realize.

Let us further notice briefly two other results of this disposition of heart. Perhaps one of its most blessed consequences is that it merges the pursuit of the highest excellence for ourselves in the most generous emotion of which the soul is capable. Let a man be his own end, in any respect, and then, however high his standard, the pursuit

of righteousness can hardly fail to bring about some form of self-righteousness, or, in other words, of selfishness. Nor do men escape from this danger, as is supposed by one current form of philosophy in the present day, by making the happiness of their fellows their great aim, and by living for others. For it still remains true that the highest form of self-sacrifice, thus realized, is a virtue of the man's own; it is nobody else's virtue. It may redound to the benefit of others, but the credit of it is mainly his own. Let him attribute as much as he pleases to humanity and other influences, still he remains the centre of his own actions, the immediate source of the virtues he exhibits. But when we are told to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven, all is changed. We sink, in all our actions, into insignificance; if we work out our own salvation or that of others, we are ever sensible that it is God that worketh in us, both to will and

to do of His good pleasure, and to Him all the glory is referred. What can be a grander and more blessed conception than thus to merge all virtue into love—the eternal love of an eternal God—not living for ourselves, or through ourselves, or in ourselves, but in, and for, and through Him? We do not lose our self-consciousness; we retain the happiness of conscious relation to Him; but we lose every selfish and private consideration, and our life is a continual return of His infinite and eternal love.

Lastly, it will be seen that, from this point of view, there is no one so weak, or so imperfect, or so sinful, as not to be able to take to himself the promises of the Beatitudes. In our sin and evil, we might well shrink from such lofty aims as our Lord sets before us; and, if standing by ourselves, such shrinking might even be the dictate of a proper modesty. But when we are assured that all these blessings and perfections are opened to us, not by virtue of our own strength, but by the grace of

God, by His gracious will and power, that is, to bestow them on us, all difficulty of this kind disappears. We are mercifully debarred from pleading any excuse for faint-heartedness in our moral and spiritual life, and are summoned by the strongest of all obligations to struggle through that strait gate, and to enter on that narrow way, from which we had turned aside. For our Lord concludes His sermon, as He began it, by assurances of infinite blessing. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." However a man may have fallen, however he may have impaired his spiritual strength, however great his temptations, however little worthy he may be of such hopes as this sermon holds out to him, all is remedied by this proclamation of Divine strength and Divine light. To all alike the exhortation applies, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVE.

*"After this manner therefore pray ye : Our Father, which art
in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name."*—ST. MATT. vi. 9.

XIII.

THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVE.

THERE are few points relating to religion on which there is so general an assent as prevails respecting the prayer of which this is the first petition. It is all but universally recognized, wherever the teaching of our Lord is known, as the standard, not merely of Christian thought, but of all earnest religious feeling. Amidst the controversies with which the Christian world is distracted, none but a few obscure sectarian voices refuse to render unqualified submission to the authority of the Lord's Prayer. In moments of supreme struggle, or in the hour of death, it springs to the lips of men who feel that they know not how to pray as they ought; and many who shrink from an acceptance of the

dogmatic truths of the Christian religion are content to adopt this prayer, and seem to find a refuge for their spirits in its calm and comprehensive utterances. Except on the principles of the Christian faith, it is indeed impracticable, as will be seen in the sequel, to utter the prayer, and especially its first petition, with an adequate consciousness of its meaning and of our own position. But it is none the less remarkable that the natural voice of the human heart recognizes in this prayer the true expression of what its impulses ought to be, and thus bears an involuntary testimony to the truth of this central point in our Lord's teaching.

In reasoning and meditating, therefore, on the Lord's Prayer we are appealing to principles which command almost indisputable authority among us; and some reflections on the petition, in the text may consequently serve to bring home to us, with greater force than any appeal to more abstract argument, the vital character of the obligation which it implies. It is an obligation, and at the

same time a privilege, which strong influences around us tend grievously to obscure. The petition clearly implies that the supreme desire of our hearts, and therefore the primary object of our lives, should be the hallowing of God's name, or the manifestation of His glory. By virtue of its being the first petition, it governs all the others, and they must be regarded as subordinated to it, and as subserving its main principles. The object of the establishment of God's kingdom, and the doing of His will, of our physical maintenance, of the forgiveness of our sins, and of our preservation from evil, is ultimately that God's true name, character, and glory may be displayed through the works of His hands, and especially by the words and deeds of men. The petition establishes, therefore, a definite order in the various impulses and desires of mankind. It does not supersede those secondary desires, or require them to be suppressed. The principle has been sometimes exaggerated by ardent Christian spirits into this extreme form, but such an exaggeration

appears plainly inconsistent with the sequel of the prayer.

The fact that the first three petitions are all directed to the fulfilment of God's will and purposes is, indeed, sufficient to show that those purposes should take precedence of all others in our minds ; but the utterance of the simplest and most urgent human needs has never received so touching a sanction as in the last three petitions, in which we are permitted to pray for our daily bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from evil. Our Lord, indeed, in the context, bids us dismiss anxiety for our personal needs, especially for those of this life ; but He does so, not on the ground that those wants are in themselves to be despised, but, on the contrary, on the ground that God is so generous and gracious a Father that we may be sure He will bestow upon us, not only all that is requisite for the necessities of life, but all that is desirable for its comfort, its grace, and even its splendour. "Consider," He says, "the lilies of the field I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed

like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" In that sentence He not only sanctions, but actually promises, the bestowal on human nature of all the noblest developments of civilization—all the science, art, and glory of which Solomon was the embodiment. But the whole excellence of any constitution such as that of human nature depends less on the character of its several parts and elements than on their relation to each other, and their maintenance in due order and subordination; and what our Lord teaches is that all these personal and social cravings should be indulged in harmony with one supreme motive and desire, and in strict subordination to it. "Seek first," He says, "the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." In this description of the true constitution of a Christian mind there is no maiming of human nature, no denial of any one of its ordinary innate

instincts, but simply the establishment of a true balance and order among them, and the declaration that there is one impulse which should be the master of all, the supreme governing authority of mind and heart.

Now this is one of those truths which in a general sense are very familiar to us, but if we are to give it its due force in our hearts and lives, we have need to reflect very constantly and earnestly on the gracious form in which it is presented to us in this petition. Most thoughtful minds recognize the obligation of duty, and of obedience to conscience, as taking precedence of all other impulses and motives; and the acknowledgment of this principle is the starting-point of any sound or effectual moral teaching. But it is only the starting-point; and if human nature, and our own characters, are to receive the full moral and spiritual energy of which they are capable, and at the same time obtain the strength and consolation which they need in the struggles and trials of life, we must rise above this general and abstract view of

our position, and realize the vivid light which is thrown over our whole existence by the teaching of our Lord in this passage. What He would have us realize is not merely that we have a duty to perform, but that we have a Father in heaven, whom we can absolutely trust here and hereafter, and who invites us to make it the one supreme object of our lives to hallow His Name, to accept the goodness and grace He is ready to bestow on us, and to make it manifest to the world by our lives in word and deed. He reveals, in the very terms of the petition, not merely a duty towards God, but a relation of the deepest affection and confidence. It would be one thing to be taught to say, "O God, hallowed be Thy Name." It is another thing to be privileged to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." In this form, it will be seen, God does not come before us merely as the Supreme Being, whose will we are unable to resist, who has created all things for Himself, and for whose pleasure they are and were created. All this is

involved in the conception. But it is transformed into one of infinite grace, tenderness, and affection, by this appeal to our Father, who knows all we need, who is sure to supply it in proportion to our trust in Him, and for whom and with whom we may work in perfect confidence and peace. He is revealed to us in the context of this passage as a God of perfect goodness, holiness, love, and truth, in whom, and in whose kingdom, are all the treasures that our souls can desire. Our Lord brings Him before us as graciously consenting to associate us with Himself, coming into the midst of us, adding the presence of His infinite love and grace to our hearts and lives, and asking us, through His only Son, to accept all this grace, and to make it our supreme happiness, as well as our supreme duty, to live with Him and for Him.

This involves a transformation of human existence; and it constitutes the grand revelation contained in the Sermon on the Mount. Almost all men pay homage to the exquisite moral teaching which that sermon contains; on

some points, with justice, they have dwelt on its harmony with the deepest instincts, and the best teaching, of the prophets and other great masters of our race. But we miss its main force unless we realize its animating principle, and appreciate the way in which all morality and all duty are transformed and transfigured under the heavenly light thrown on it by this central revelation of our Father in heaven. To modify the fine image of a great English poet, human life and its moral obligations were discernible, in their main outlines, before our Lord's time, to thoughtful and honest observers; but while illumined solely by reason, the vast and intricate scene lay under a glimmering light, "dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars, to lonely, weary, wandering travellers." This revelation, however, not merely of the God who is the Creator of all, but of a Father in heaven, and not merely of a Father in heaven, but of *our* Father in heaven—this, in these three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount, casts over the whole scene the warmth and light of a heavenly day,

and reanimates all human hopes and energies. Henceforth the travellers over the difficult paths of life are no more lonely, for their Father is with them, and need never be wandering, if they do but look to His guidance. It is the theology, rather than the morality, of the Sermon on the Mount which constitutes its main characteristic and its supreme motive power. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. . . . Love your enemies, . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. . . . When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth : that thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly. . . . When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and . . . pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. . . . Ask, and it shall be given you. . . . If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to

them that ask Him." The introduction into our world of this Heavenly Father, in this personal relation to us, reorganizes all other relations, transforms and illuminates them. That which our Lord does in this prayer, and in the Sermon on the Mount, is to give us all one common Father, in a sense in which men had never enjoyed that blessing before, and in which it is nowhere enjoyed apart from His revelation ; and our happiness, our main duty and privilege, as Christians, is to realize that Father's presence, to live as in that Father's sight, to desire above all things His glory, to be thankful to make it the one object of our lives to work for His name and His will.

Probably if we interrogate our consciences honestly, we shall most of us, if not all, feel that our tendency is to live far short of this inspiring motive and revelation. The danger and the weakness of even Christian lives is to make themselves the centre of their thoughts and hopes, and to look to God chiefly for aid and support in their own personal needs, and for their own objects. Those wants and objects

may be in themselves laudable or innocent, and yet we may fall short of the true purpose and order of our lives, by the mere fact of making them our first object, and the hallowing of God's name and the doing of His will the second. It will be seen, however, that the effect of our living in the spirit of this petition would be the complete subordination of our own wants and desires—in a word, of ourselves—to the will, the honour, and the interest of our Father in heaven. It would induce, not an artificial and unnatural self-denial and asceticism, but a complete self-surrender, self-forgetfulness, and contentment.

It may be observed, also, that the cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, and that which it is our special privilege, as members of a reformed and Protestant Church, to grasp, meets the greatest difficulty which can be presented to such a spirit of self-forgetfulness. There is one want which, as soon as the depths of the soul are stirred, is so imperious that men cannot rest until it is satisfied; I mean the need of pardon and peace, forgiveness for their sins, and of

personal salvation from the evil and misery that our consciences tell us we have incurred. This is a craving so terrible as to have at times distorted the fair proportions of Christianity, and to have induced men to withdraw themselves from all natural obligations in the pursuit of their own personal salvation. Though a terrible perversion, it is but the exaggeration of a true and inevitable instinct under which men have thus withdrawn from their fellows, and from all the duties of life, in order to assure themselves, by a long course of prayer and austerities, of ultimate salvation. But the great truth, vindicated by the Reformers, of complete justification and forgiveness for Christ's sake alone, removes this burden and oppression, and gives us the assurance that, in the concerns of our souls, no less than in those of our bodies, our Father knows what we have need of before we ask Him. We are invited to trust ourselves, with all our sins and our weaknesses, to His Fatherly hands, assured that for Christ's sake He forgives us, and that He will accept us, unworthy as we

are, to be His children, and to live for Him,—in a word, to serve Him with a quiet mind, to do His will, and to hallow His name for the future. If this anxiety can be removed and this barrier broken down, the way is open for that complete forgetfulness of ourselves, that concentration of our whole thoughts and energies on the glory of God, to which our Lord invites us, and which alone can raise us out of our natural weakness, and give us at once the power and the dignity of children of God.

It is this assurance of perfect forgiveness and grace, with all the calm confidence it brings with it, which is peculiarly the characteristic of the Sermon on the Mount. Its teaching, and its spirit, transcend in this respect, as we might anticipate, any other part of the inspired writings. Elsewhere, as particularly in the Epistles of St. Paul, we seem to follow the struggles of wounded and erring human souls, striving to realize the forgiveness, the redemption, and the grace which have been bestowed on them. But as we listen to our Lord on the mount, we seem to hear the calm

and assured accents of One who has the gift of forgiveness in His hands, who sees and knows the love of His Father with a clearness vouchsafed to no one else, not even to His Apostles, and who asks us, with the certainty which that knowledge alone justifies, to trust our Father in heaven, to love Him, and to live for Him. If we realize our Lord as thus speaking to us from His Father, giving us His personal assurance, and taking us by the hand, it will be strange if we do not gain more and more of the love and trust He would inspire in us, more and more make God, and not ourselves or anything else, the centre and main-spring of our life, and live, and work, and pray, that God's name may be hallowed.

There are grievous influences at work at the present day which tend to obscure this gracious truth; and it well deserves our thoughtful reflection how far we are doing our duty in respect to the efforts, which are now so prominent and persistent, to put aside, or at least to put into a secondary place this principle of living above all things

for God's sake, and desiring above all things the hallowing of His Name. Questions of belief in the existence of God, questions relating to our personal relations and our duty towards Him, are discussed all around us as open matters of opinion. By all means let honest objections and heartfelt struggles be met with patience and answered with care. No one who has had much experience of the difficulties of thought and life in the present day will fail to meet individuals who may entertain such doubts in a sympathetic spirit. But it becomes us, at the same time, to recognize that questions relating to our belief in God, and to our relations towards Him, are not mere matters of opinion. They are matters of practice, and they affect our deepest obligations. Whatever allowance may be made for the errors of individuals, it becomes us to recognize that errors of this kind, instead of being merely speculative, have in them the character of nothing less than unfaithfulness to a natural relation—a kind of treason, not merely against the Lord of all, but against our Father

in heaven, and involving flat rejection of that Saviour who not only lived, but died, to give us assurance of this truth. It becomes us ever to remember that we are the representatives, not of an hypothesis, not of a principle, not of a mere power, but of our Father which is in heaven; and we should regard words spoken, and thoughts indulged, in derogation of Him, with a similar—though surely with a far greater—pain, and in some cases indignation, to that with which we should hear the existence or the goodness of a father or friend denied among ourselves. Let it be added, moreover, that this perhaps would be one of the strongest influences we could exercise in combating such errors. Let men see, by our words, our looks, and our conduct, that we live as men who know and love our Father in heaven, and they may begin to believe what they never would have been argued into acknowledging.

But, at all events, let this be our main inspiring impulse. Let us be assured that we have all had our tasks set us by our

Father in heaven ; that He is ever with us, to guide, support, and reward us ; that He graciously gives us His Holy Spirit, at once to think those things that be good, and to perform the same. There can be no such security against temptation, as to realize that we are ever in the presence of our Father in heaven, and that every violation of duty is a personal wrong done to His loving will, and to the love of His Son, who gave His life for us ; there can be no such source of energy, as to be assured of the constant assistance of His Spirit ; and, finally, there can be no such support in the trials and difficulties that may meet us, as to be willing, "patiently and with thanksgiving, to bear our Heavenly Father's corrections, whensoever, by any manner of adversity, it shall please His gracious goodness to visit us." Let it therefore be our constant prayer that He will pour into our hearts such love towards Him, that we, loving him above all things, may obtain His promises, which exceed all that we can desire ; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

OUR LORD'S MERCY.

*"Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman,
great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."*

—ST. MATT. XV. 28.

XIV.

OUR LORD'S MERCY.

THE story of the woman of Canaan possesses a peculiar interest for us, as we are taught to apply its lesson to ourselves at the most solemn moment of our chief act of worship. That which is called the "prayer of humble access" in the Communion Service, immediately before the prayer of consecration, is based on this woman's act of faith, and on our Lord's commendation of it. "We do not presume," we are taught to say, "to come to this Thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table. But Thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy." The story must

thus be regarded as embodying one of the most essential principles in our relations to God, and one which should be specially prominent in our minds in our deepest spiritual experiences. It is one of those simple incidents in the Gospel history which exhibit the types of all spiritual life, and enable us to realize, far better than by mere instruction, our true spiritual relations.

The circumstances of the case are at first sight surprising, and exhibit our Saviour in an unwonted character. He seems to show the greatest reluctance to perform one of those works of mercy by which His ministry was marked. The woman appeals to Him again and again, with the most patient earnestness, as the Son of David, to relieve her daughter's misery, and He treats her with persistent coldness. To her first appeal for mercy He answers not a word. Then His disciples, disturbed by her continued importunity, beg Him to send her away—obviously with her request granted—because she cried after them. But He silences them with the statement that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the

house of Israel. Then the woman presses close to Him, falls at His feet, and implores Him again to help her; and then He repels her with a severe answer: "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs." This was putting His reply to the disciples in its harshest and, it might almost seem, most cruel form; and not until the woman breaks through even this defence, by pleading that the very dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table, does our Lord yield. "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

This unusual conduct of our Lord has been often attributed to an intention of calling into full consciousness the faith which He knew to exist in the woman's heart, and thus at once to deepen it in herself, and to elicit an example which should serve, as it has served, for the instruction and support of all Christian souls. But without excluding this consideration, there are some circumstances in the case which seem

to give a more obvious explanation of the first motive of our Lord's conduct, and may give the story a still closer application to ourselves. It would appear that the incident occurred immediately after those remarkable scenes in which our Lord had at once raised to the highest point of enthusiasm some of His followers, and had evoked the indignation of the scribes. After the feeding of the five thousand, the people had exclaimed, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world;" and Jesus, we are told, perceived that they would take Him by force, to make Him a king, and He had to depart into a mountain alone, and crossed the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. There the people ran to Him from the whole region round about, and began to "carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard He was. And whithersoever He entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment: and as many as touched Him were made whole." Then followed His

discourse respecting the bread of life, which gave deep offence to the Jews, and even to many of His disciples; and then various discussions with the Sadducees and Pharisees respecting ceremonial observances, in which He deeply wounded their prejudices, implying, as He told His disciples, that they were blind leaders of the blind. It would seem that, in consequence of this twofold excitement, on the part of His disciples on the one side, and of the Pharisaic party on the other, our Lord deemed it prudent to retire to some district where He could for a time escape observation. St. Matthew says that He withdrew into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and St. Mark adds that "He entered into an house, and would have no man know it." He was therefore especially concerned, for an important purpose, to abstain from any such exercise of His miraculous powers as would lead to His again arousing that attention from which He was for a time endeavouring to escape; and if He had at once healed the heathen woman who came from the neighbouring country, He might well

have been again besieged, and the purpose of his retirement frustrated. It was not the time for Him to exercise His powers of mercy; and this alone would explain some exhibition of unwillingness to respond to the woman's appeal.

But there is a further consideration to be borne in mind, which shows that His repellent answers were more than formal excuses. "I am not sent," He told His disciples, "but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Now this was a definite principle of His ministry, to which, as another instance shows, great importance is to be attached. Not long before this, He had sent out His twelve disciples on a special mission, and He had expressly charged them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." His answer to the disciples in this instance, therefore, was but an assertion of the principle which He had inculcated on themselves. It is not necessary for our present purpose to

discuss at length the reason of this principle. It may be only an example of the principle afterwards enunciated by St. Paul—that it was necessary, in accordance with the Divine purposes, that the Gospel should first be preached to the Jews, and that they were intended to enjoy special privileges if they had availed themselves of the offers made to them; that they were intended, perhaps, to be the prime agents, as a nation, and not merely in the persons of the Apostles, in the kingdom of God. At all events, it was a merciful concession to their prejudices that they should not, in the first instance, be deprived of all the prominence they had enjoyed as God's chosen people, but should be admitted to the first honours and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. But whatever the reason, such was the fact. It was contrary to the settled plan of our Lord's ministry that its blessings should, at this stage, be extended to any others than to the Jews; and consequently when this woman appealed to Him, she was asking Him to depart from

an important principle of His ordinary conduct. His ministry was governed by certain laws, which had been determined for purposes of the highest import, and it was no easy matter for Him to depart from them.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, it may be that the apparent harshness of our Lord is really an indication of a precisely opposite feeling. It may be that, in the first instance, He answered her not a word, because, so far as we may attribute human emotions to His conduct, her appeal raised in Him a conflict of feelings, and He knew not how to answer her. On the one hand, His merciful heart would be touched to its depths by the spectacle of her misery and her patient love for her daughter; on the other hand, He was restrained from yielding to His first impulse by the principles of His ministry. We may be permitted to apply to Him the language of the Evangelist on another occasion, and say that He feared He "could not do" the work of mercy which He nevertheless longed to perform. He cannot explain it to

the woman, and so He answers her not a word. When His disciples appeal to Him, He gives them at once the real reason of His hesitation,—He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,—and they, with His commission to them still fresh in their memories, feel that the argument cannot be answered. But when the woman refuses to be repulsed, and falls at His feet, He is compelled to tell her the reason also; and if we may conceive that conflict of feelings of which I have spoken, it may, perhaps, be felt to be a mark, not of harshness, but of the deepest sympathy, that our Lord should couch the reason in still severer terms. Deep feeling struggling to conceal itself is wont to seek protection in such severe expressions, which derive their very harshness from the depth of the emotion which they are endeavouring to conceal and to repress. All this appears perfectly natural, perfectly in harmony with the effect which would be produced in a mind of intense pity, checked by some law in the indulgence of its impulse of mercy. And so

when at length, as Luther says, the woman, by a master-stroke, ensnares our Lord in His own words, and turns His reason—His real reason—for refusing her into an argument for His help, we may well regard Him as really, and not apparently, overpowered by her faith and trust, and the deepest emotions of His heart break forth in His words, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The woman had actually succeeded, by her earnest importunity and trust, in inducing our Lord, at a time in some respects most inopportune, to infringe a settled principle of His ministry. She had wrestled with Him, against His own fixed determination, and had compelled Him, as it were, to give free play to His love, independently of the restraint of the laws under which He was for a time acting.

It will, I think, be seen that this aspect of the narrative adds a great attraction and force to the bearing of the story upon ourselves. The position it illustrates is that of men who are living under a fixed dispensation of God's

government, under which His conduct towards them is, as a rule, determined by definite laws and conditions, under which they must, for instance, expect certain consequences to follow from their conduct, and can only look for His assistance and blessing in ways and at times which He has determined. This was in a peculiar degree the position of the Jews, and of the Gentiles also, under the Old Dispensation; and it still remains to a large extent the condition of Christians. We, too, are under a covenant; a new covenant, indeed, but no less definite than the old; and we and God alike are bound by its conditions. If we violate our baptismal pledges, if we fail to use those ordinances which are its appointed means of grace, if we forfeit our rights by yielding to known sin, then under all ordinary circumstances we must expect the consequences, and we make agrievous mistake in appealing lightly to the mercy of God. Doubtless His mercy is infinite; but so is His truth and justice, and His determination to uphold the laws He has

laid down. Our Lord, in the instance before us, was moved to the depths of His heart by this woman's appeal. We cannot doubt that He longed to help her. But it was not easy for Him, it was very hard, to infringe the rule which He had definitely laid down for His own guidance, with important objects in view. It would destroy all the purposes of God's government, considered as a means of education, if the laws He has laid down could be departed from whenever their maintenance should seem to conflict with the impulses of mercy. It is not only a shallow and feeble conception of God's character to imagine it easy for Him to dispense with the consequences of the violation of His laws, but it involves a practical denial of His exercising any moral government at all.

Our Lord's conduct towards this woman must therefore be taken, in the first instance, as one of the deepest warning. It shows that it was hard, cruelly hard, even for the Saviour Himself, to yield to an impulse of mercy when it militated against the settled principles of

His action. The laws and rules of His moral government must be maintained conspicuously in force, if the weak and wavering wills of men are to be trained to steadfastness, and if the principles on which He has constituted our nature are to be revealed and vindicated. The Saviour, answering not a word to a poor heart-broken woman, refusing the appeal of His followers in her favour, and repelling her with a harsh answer, must, for our warning, be taken to illustrate what must be often the feeling of God towards us when we have violated our covenant with Him, and expect Him to have pity on us simply because of the misery we have brought upon ourselves. Doubtless He longs to have mercy on us, but He cannot be more relenting than the Saviour Himself was. Something more than a mere appeal, something more than a confession of misery, is needed, if the fixed rules of His government are to be modified in our favour.

But that which is needed is shown, for our infinite encouragement, in the example of this woman. By the side of these rules of His

ordinary government, there is ever present a higher principle, or a higher law—that of the response of perfect love to genuine and entire faith. There is an appeal which the Saviour knows not how to resist, even from those who have the least claim to the ordinary exercise of His mercy, and that is the appeal of a heart which throws itself absolutely upon Him, which is sensible how completely it is destitute of all claim on His mercy, how by all the laws and rules of ordinary moral government it has forfeited any right to love and forgiveness, but which casts itself unreservedly upon His love and power. If one of His creatures comes to Him in this spirit, recognizing his true condition, not appealing for His grace on false grounds, but doing homage to His laws and His justice, and trusting solely to His love, the appeal is irresistible.

It is to be observed that such an appeal answers, for the most part, the very purpose for which the laws established by God are ordinarily maintained. Though it would be inadequate without the perfect atonement

offered by our Lord, yet, so far as it goes, it constitutes a distinct acknowledgment of God's laws and vindication of them; and so far as this is ensured, the main purpose of the Divine government is answered. In the case of this woman, for instance, it will be noticed that, by acknowledging the inferior position which our Saviour's answer assigned to her, by accepting it in the fullest degree, and not shrinking from even the most disparaging appellation, she vindicated in the eyes of the disciples, and of all those of her own countrymen who might hear of the miracle, the principle of our Saviour's ministry which He was concerned to assert. The request was granted as an exception, and no one who was not prepared to accept the same position could expect the same mercy. So it is with ourselves. God cannot resist the cries of an honest and contrite heart; but it must be honest and contrite in the deepest and most genuine sense, it must be duly sensible of its evil, and that for its evil deeds it worthily deserves to be punished; and just in proportion to its recognition of its true

position in this respect, and to the earnestness and truth with which it surrenders itself absolutely to God, to His judgment as well as to His mercy, to His whole will for this world and for the next, may it confidently hope that its bitter prayers will be answered, and that its faith will save it. There are no limits to the Saviour's love and forgiveness, but His mercy can only be exercised so far as His ordinary laws are fully vindicated by confession, and perfect submission for the future. If only this be done, no sin need finally debar us from Him. If not in one character, yet in another ; if we have forfeited the position of children, yet even as "dogs," we can appeal to Him as "hating nothing that He has made, and as forgiving the sins of all them that are penitent."

OUR LORD SAVING SINNERS.

"Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."—
ST. LUKE XV. 1, 2.

XV.

OUR LORD SAVING SINNERS.

IF we realize the circumstances of this scene, there will appear something very extraordinary in the revelation it gives us of human nature on the one side, and of our Lord's graciousness on the other. "Then drew near unto Him," we are told, "all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." The phrase seems to imply that they were constantly around Him, as does the complaint of the Pharisees which immediately follows. They came to Him, as in the instances of Zacchæus and the woman that was a sinner, for grace and deliverance. They were the morally sick of divers diseases and torments, and He healed them. But, we are told, "the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This

man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Now consider who, and of what character, were the men who raised this objection. They were, in their own opinion, and to a great extent in the general popular opinion, the most righteous class among the Jews. They observed all the external ordinances of the Law with minute and conscientious accuracy ; and they held themselves apart, as a peculiarly holy class, from men and women such as the publicans and sinners. Such was their character in their own belief, and in that of most of their fellows. But, as a matter of fact, they were, if not the worst class among the Jews of the day, at least as bad as those whom they thus spurned, and whom they would have kept from our Saviour. We have our Lord's own denunciation of them afterwards: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto

men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Their real character, in fact, was too soon to stand revealed by the most awful and damning evidence. Within a few months of the time at which they were thus asserting their superiority and separation from sinners, they perpetrated the most terrible crime the world has ever seen, becoming the deliberate betrayers and murderers of the Just One. They "denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them, and killed the Prince of life." That crime can only have been the result of an intense depth of malignity, and hatred of the highest truth and righteousness. It betrayed a state of mind far worse than that of the publicans and sinners; for it showed that, as our Lord said, they had so hardened themselves against righteousness as to be incapable of repentance. "Verily I say unto you," He exclaims, "that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness,

and ye believed him not : but the publicans and the harlots believed him : and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

The spectacle exhibited to us, therefore, is that of a body of men who, individually and as a class, were in the deepest need of that saving power which our Lord was extending to the publicans and sinners, yet totally unconscious of their condition, and incapable of even apprehending the character and motives of such salvation. As they would have supposed, they might have associated with our Lord on terms of mutual equality, needing nothing at His hands ; and yet they were really in that state of utter separation from all truth and goodness which their conduct soon revealed. There has been no such revelation of the fearful capacities of the human heart to blind itself to its own real condition. But now let us consider the attitude of our Saviour towards these men. In order to explain His conduct towards the publicans and sinners, He pro-

ceeds, in a succession of parables, to exhibit and vindicate what might be called the saving instinct in true human nature: intimating what He expressed more explicitly elsewhere, that the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. If it be but a single sheep out of a hundred, what man is there, He asks, "who doth not leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" or what woman, if she lose one piece of money out of ten, "doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" Or, as in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which immediately follows, what father, if one of his sons have been lost and dead to him, does not welcome him back with an outburst of joy, more marked, even if not absolutely greater, than that with which he delighted in a son who had never left him? If these instances show the true instinct of the human heart, they exhibit to us also the heart of the Son of man, and of the God

of whom He is the express image and likeness ; and even, therefore, if the publicans and sinners had been as comparatively degraded as the Pharisees supposed, it would have been impossible for Him not to have gone after them, to win them back, and to welcome them to His society and fellowship.

But it will be evident that such parables, and the principles they illustrate, are not applicable only to the case of the publicans and sinners. If they display our Lord's feelings towards one class of the lost, they must express His feelings towards all. It matters not which is the sheep, or whither it has wandered. The shepherd will equally go after it, until he finds it. But in view of what has just been said of the character and condition of the Pharisees, we must recognize that they belonged to the class of the lost, even more than the publicans and sinners. They had "erred and strayed like lost sheep" in even more perilous directions, and were in even more imminent danger of utter destruction. When they revealed their

blindness and hardness of heart by murmuring at our Lord receiving sinners and eating with them, is it conceivable that He did not feel the same impulse to save them, and to bring them back to Him, as He had felt towards the more visibly degraded classes of His countrymen? Any such supposition, it would seem, would do great injustice to the comprehensiveness and intensity of the saving impulse in the Saviour's heart. These Pharisees and Scribes were, in an eminent degree, the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand, the most eminent members of the race whom he had chosen to Himself to be His inheritance, and at least in their capacities, mental and moral, not unworthy of being chosen for such a high destiny. We are somewhat apt, perhaps, to contemplate our Lord's love and saving power too exclusively in relation to the lower and weaker classes, towards whom it was more conspicuously successful. Perhaps something of the Pharisee clings about us all, and we associate the idea of the lost, as the

Pharisees and scribes did, most naturally with those who are lost in the eye of the world. But our Lord can have made no such distinction, and can have been liable to no such disproportion of moral vision; and we must conceive Him yearning over the Pharisees and scribes, in their hardness and bitterness, not less than over the classes who were more visibly suffering. After all, the worst diseases are those which are internal, and the Saviour, who knew the hearts of all men, must have had His deepest sympathy called out for those who, though unconscious of it, were the most deeply ruined. What else, in fact, is the meaning of that supreme and most touching lamentation, when He exclaimed, at the close of His ministry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not"? As those words imply, it is the Jerusalem of these very Scribes and Pharisees,

the Jerusalem which killed the prophets, and stoned them which were sent unto her, and which, as He knew, was about to crucify Himself, whose children He would fain have gathered together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. These were the feelings with which He must have contemplated the very men who addressed to Him that murmur—a murmur which, though they knew it not, applied even more to themselves than to others, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

Such, as expressed elsewhere by our Lord Himself, was His feeling towards these self-righteous and perverse classes; and if we peruse the Gospels with this consideration in view, we shall discern throughout further evidence of it, and obtain a striking illustration of our Lord’s method as a Saviour. His mission, as declared by the angels at His birth, was to save His people from their sins. That involves everything else. If He could have restored to them their moral and spiritual health, all other blessings would

have followed. The kingdom of heaven was at hand; He was soon to establish all its new powers and privileges; and the Jews had only to repent, in order to enter into the full enjoyment of them. Accordingly we find His work of salvation consisting, throughout, of efforts to arouse men's consciences, to awaken their sense of their moral evil and spiritual misery, and to induce them to come to Him for life and deliverance. He commences, therefore, by exposing, as in the Sermon on the Mount, the fallacies and corruptions into which the Jewish conscience had been betrayed, casting the vivid and piercing light of a perfect moral discernment upon all the dark and sepulchral corners of the religious life of the day, and at the same time proclaiming, in Himself and in His Father, a grace and goodness sufficient to support men under all dangers, and carry them through all temptations. If He proclaimed, on the one hand, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, . . . because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth

unto life, and few there be that find it," He proclaimed at the same time, and almost in the same breath, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh"—even at that strait gate—"it shall be opened."

This proclamation and this promise were to all alike, to Scribes and Pharisees no less than to His disciples and to the people at large; but the different manner in which it was received by various classes necessitated different methods in His further preaching. By the Scribes and Pharisees it was resented and rejected, and that so fiercely, that from a very early period of His ministry we find Him sensible that He was not safe in Judæa and Jerusalem. But the message, alike of repentance and of grace, was welcomed by simpler and less instructed people, who, in the districts at a distance from Jerusalem, were less under the influence of the ruling classes. Accordingly, in mercy alike to the

scribes and Pharisees and to these simpler people, our Lord left Judæa and departed into Galilee, and the greater part of His ministry, as recorded in the first three Gospels, was passed there, and was specially directed to the needs and the convictions of the Galilean population. The manner in which He was received and treated by the ruling classes at Jerusalem is chiefly recorded in the Gospel of St. John, and, as has been observed already, the difference, on which so much objection has sometimes been based, between the character of our Lord's teaching in the fourth Gospel from that which is represented in the other three, is abundantly explained by the fact that it was addressed to a wholly different class, and was directed to meet other difficulties. In Jerusalem, He was surrounded by a learned community, deeply impregnated with lofty theological speculations. In Galilee He was dealing with a simpler population, with whom it was more important to insist on the simpler elements in His message.

But what we are concerned to observe, in order to illustrate our Lord's method and motives, is that, in withdrawing from Jerusalem for a while, and thus avoiding the fierce opposition which He from the outset encountered there, He afforded to the Pharisees and their allies a time, as it were, of grace, an opportunity for reconsidering the attitude they had taken towards Him, as they heard, or occasionally saw, His words of truth or deeds of mercy elsewhere. While He preached the Gospel to the poor in Galilee, He was affording the Pharisees an opportunity of understanding it better. During this period, therefore, He appears to avoid, as far as possible, placing Himself in vehement antagonism with them. There is a wonderful patience in His method of dealing with them whenever they come across His path. The parables, as has often been observed, are a conspicuous illustration of this accommodation to their weakness, of this desire, so to speak, to give them time. He embodies,

the truth in stories more calculated than any others to come home to men's hearts, by appealing to their natural feelings; but He abstains as long as He can from giving those narratives any direct personal application. The Pharisees perceive at the last that He begins to speak parables against them; but the early parables, and the greater number, like those in this passage, simply express, in the most touching form, essential elements of His message, and reveal His true character, without any direct rebuke or personal denunciation.

From this point of view, we cannot fail to observe the supreme gentleness and patience of the manner in which He met the observation, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." With what justice might He not have turned indignantly upon them! How naturally a human teacher would have so turned upon them, asking them what right they had to denounce others as sinners, when they were sinners of an even deeper dye themselves, needing even

a mightier salvation! We can, in fact, hardly conceive an occasion in itself more fitting for some such severe rebuke, than one on which the intense hypocrisy and selfishness of the Pharisees were thus displayed. But our Lord was to them, as to others, a Saviour; and with supreme patience, He makes an appeal to their better nature in these simple stories, as though He would fain find His way, if possible, into some kindly human corner of their hearts, and thus win their sympathy and trust. Picture to yourselves these fierce and stern hypocrites, endeavouring to stand between our Lord and the sinning and suffering souls He was saving; imagine the indignation you would probably have felt, if you had been present at such an exhibition of hard-heartedness, and had understood it, and you will then appreciate in some measure the supreme gentleness which only replies by that simple parable of the Lost Sheep—just that one tender image, held up before those hard faces, to see if it would

not soften them, and lead them to trust that gentle hand themselves.

But at length, when all these patient efforts and these merciful appeals have failed, when it becomes evident that their hearts were hardened, and that graciousness had no effect upon them—then, but not till then, and doubtless still with the same merciful intention, our Lord resorted to the last weapon at His command, the most terrible arrow in His quiver. In Scriptural language, He “made a way to His indignation,” and denounced them with a sternness, and almost bitterness, to which there is no parallel elsewhere. In that chapter of St. Matthew where He reiterates, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” where He finally exclaims, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” He seems to be casting upon them “the furiousness of His wrath, anger, displeasure, and trouble.” But that, even in the midst of this final tumult and tempest of Divine wrath, the feelings and impulses of a Saviour are still present and still supreme,

is shown by the striking fact that it is at the end of this awful denunciation, as its last word and the very essence of its spirit, that He uttered the touching lamentation already quoted, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." It is a Saviour's voice to the last, now in gentleness and now in wrath, but ever yearning after the lost, and sparing Himself nothing, either of patience, or indignation, or suffering, or prayer, that He might win them back.

Do not these considerations illustrate the unity of our Lord's ministry, and cast a peculiarly gracious light upon all His teaching? From first to last He is saving His people from their sins—the weak and corrupt by arousing in them at once a recognition of their corruption, and a conviction of His will and power to save them; and the hard-hearted and self-willed by endeavouring, if possible, to

soften them, but if not, to break them down—anything, rather than leave them under the miserable delusion that they do not need His help for their salvation. He offered salvation—that is, deliverance from sin—to all, and every one who thus submitted to Him and trusted in Him was delivered. Often, as in the case of the Apostles themselves, old weaknesses, temptations, and errors lingered in them, and were but gradually eradicated; but while He was with them He led them onward in the strait and narrow way towards everlasting life; and when He was taken from them He sent them His Spirit, to continue His guidance, and even to give it them in greater measure. It is a fearful reflection that there were those who to the last set their hearts against Him, and whom He could only leave to destruction.

But if there be such combined graciousness and awfulness in this vision of our Lord's work and ministry on earth, it is our privilege and our warning to take to heart the truth that He is carrying forward pre-

cisely the same ministry now. By means of His Spirit, He deals with all of us just as He dealt of old with the publicans and sinners on the one side and with the Pharisees on the other. His voice is ever speaking within us, now in tones of mercy, now of gentle suggestion, now of severe rebuke. This is the true meaning and interpretation of that voice of the conscience, of which every soul is sensible. It is our privilege, as Christians, to know that it is no mere social influence, no mere utterance of the social sense, developed and accumulated through long ages. However such influences may coexist with a higher one, and be used by it, they are but subordinate instruments and agencies in our moral and spiritual education ; and they are all in the hands of the gracious Lord whom we have been contemplating in His saving work. Just as He addressed Himself in a different manner to different people at different times, warning them against their special dangers, and giving them grace for their special needs, so does He address Himself now to every

one of us in the secrets of our hearts, ever endeavouring to save us from our sins. Did we realize that personal presence, did we give this living and loving interpretation to the guidance of the Divine Spirit, we could hardly fail to surrender ourselves to it with greater earnestness, thankfulness, and submission; and it is hard to conceive how we could ever suffer ourselves to be overtaken by anything like Pharisaic hardness. At all events, we shall do well to remember that the one error which is irremediable is for a human being, born imperfect, and inevitably more or less corrupted by sin, to imagine, like the Pharisees, even unconsciously or partially, that he does not need a Saviour—a Saviour not merely to deliver him from the consequences of his sins, but to deliver him from the sins themselves in the present. We all need that gracious love to seek us when we go astray, and to keep us in the right fold; and the Saviour's constant assurance was that His love is ever at our side, up to the last, and even in our worst

moments, longing to gather us under its wings, and if we yield to it, ever saving us and helping us to save others. For His name was called Jesus, because "He shall save His people from their sins."



THE FATHER AND THE PRODIGAL SON.

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."—ST. LUKE
xv. 20.

XVI.

THE FATHER AND THE PRODIGAL SON.

THESE are the central words of the parable of the Prodigal Son, so familiar to every one, and so dear to all Christian souls. It is one of the parts of our Lord's teaching which commends itself immediately to our hearts; and it has been called the gospel within the gospel, containing, as it were, the very essence of the good news which our Lord came to deliver. Without following all its details, let us reconsider the central truths which it enforces. In respect to all our Lord's parables, our first and chief endeavour should be to fix our minds on the main principle which they were intended to illustrate. Their particular incidents are of great interest and beauty; but they are all

designed to bring out more clearly the main purpose for which the parable was spoken. With this view, let us bear in mind that this parable is the last of three—those of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Prodigal Son—which were spoken at the same time, in order to silence some murmurs which the Pharisees and Scribes had raised against our Lord's conduct. We are told that there “drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” They could understand His preaching to them, denouncing their sins, and calling them to a better life, but not His associating with them as one who cared for them, and felt a personal interest in their welfare. In the view of the Pharisees, God had declared certain laws, and established a fixed order in the world; and men were left thenceforth to bear the consequences of obedience or disobedience to those laws and that order. The Jewish people had been

given a privileged position in this Divinely constituted system ; and in proportion as they conformed to the rules laid down for the daily guidance of their lives, would they be admitted to its full blessings. Content with the enjoyment of these advantages themselves, they felt no concern that the Gentiles, or even the outcasts of their own nation, were destitute of them, or had forfeited them. But all they appeared to contemplate was a world of certain visible and tangible blessings, earned by obedience to certain definite duties and ceremonies, and in which those who had failed in such duties, or did not enjoy the advantages of a privileged position, must bear the natural consequence of their misfortune or their fault.

Now let us observe the manner in which our Lord meets this state of mind. The hardness of heart, and the selfish disregard of others which it displays, are painfully evident, and on other occasions our Lord expressly denounces this characteristic of the

Pharisaic mind. But on this occasion He adopts a more generous and winning method. Instead of denouncing the cruel hard-heartedness of the Pharisees and scribes, He recalls to their minds the gracious realities which they were leaving out of sight. They were contemplating, as has been said, a world of laws and rules, and of a fixed order, permanently and unalterably established by God; but they were practically leaving out of sight that God Himself, His character and His heart. Our Lord tells them the parable of the Man with a Hundred Sheep, who, if he loses one of them, leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost, until he find it. As though He would say to them, "You are thinking of the world as if it were simply a sheepfold surrounded by deserts, some of the sheep, like yourselves, being safe within the fold, others wandering from it, or never brought within it, and ever in peril of destruction. But you have forgotten the Shepherd. There is a Shepherd, to whom all those sheep are

precious, and He cannot leave them to perish, without Himself endeavouring to go after them and bring them back." Similarly, in the parable of the Lost Piece of Money, He may be regarded as saying, "You contemplate all these publicans and sinners as lost coins, scattered treasures; but do you suppose there is no one to whom they belong, and who is as much concerned to recover them as a woman to find a piece of money which she had lost?" In those two parables our Lord appeals to the simplest and commonest instincts of human nature, and asks the Pharisees whether it is reasonable to suppose that, if sheep are precious to a shepherd, and money to a housewife, human souls, however lost and erring, are not precious in the sight of Him who made them, and to whom they belong.

But in this parable of the Prodigal Son our Lord presents the same argument in a deeper and still more touching form. He reminds the Pharisees that these lost and wandering souls have not merely a Creator

to whom they belong, but a Father whose children they are, and who feels towards them with a Father's heart. He draws back, as it were, the veil which hides heaven from our view, and bids us contemplate that Father's love, yearning for the recovery of His lost children. The publicans and sinners were like the prodigal son in the far country, and the Pharisees could only see him there, in his exile, and had forgotten entirely that he had a home, and that there was a Father in that home who still loved him, and longed for his return. Thus the essential teaching of the parable, as of the two which precede it, is to be seen in the contrast between the two aspects of life as presented by the Pharisees on the one side, and by our Lord on the other. To them there is no one personally concerned with the welfare of the lost and wandering. If they are ruined, it is by their own sin, and there are none but their own friends to help them or to be the worse for their loss. Our Lord, on the other hand, reveals a spiritual world, in

which there is infinite love for every one of these wandering sheep and prodigal children. There is a heaven, in which there is joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance ; there are angels, in whose presence there is similar joy ; above all, there is a Father, who never loses His remembrance of erring sons, who sees them when they are yet a great way off, and has compassion, and is eager to receive them with the tenderest affection and the deepest joy. The Pharisees had forgotten all this divine and spiritual world. Our Lord recalls it. He proclaims Himself the Shepherd of these lost sheep, the Owner of these lost treasures, the Son of the Father, whose love to His prodigal children He reveals ; and He thus explains and justifies His own conduct, and declares the most gracious of all messages to those whom He was striving to save.

It must surely appear the strangest of all the perversities of human nature that the reality thus revealed by our Lord should

ever be allowed to assume a secondary place in men's thoughts. There can be no reality so momentous in its influence over our lives as that of our being the children of our Father in heaven, and standing to Him in the conscious relation of love and trust. Amongst ourselves, personal relations are those which have the deepest and most blessed influence on our lives, and no external advantages, of whatever kind, can compensate for unhappiness in our relations to one another. Yet, after all, as our Lord illustrates in this parable, the sad secret of human life consists, to a large extent, in the fact that men are perpetually sacrificing the blessings of love and trust, and all the gracious influences of affection, for mere external pleasure. They do it in their personal relations to each other. The prodigal son in the parable sacrifices his father's home, and his father's heart, for the sake of pleasures which have no element of affection in them. He said to his father, in characteristic phrase, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth

to me." Those material external goods were more to him than his father's affection. It is remarkable that the case is practically the same with the elder son. His complaint, at the end of the parable, when he found that his brother had been received with such rejoicing, indicates a similar coldness of feeling. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." As though the chief advantage of remaining in his father's house was that he might have an occasional feast with his friends! His father, accordingly, rebukes him by recalling to him the blessings of his personal relation with himself. "Son," he says, "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Had the prodigal son cared more for his father's affection than for any other worldly blessing, he would never have left his home for the mere excitements of pleasure. Had the elder son appreciated the depth of his father's love, and the supreme delight

of the recovery of a lost affection, he never could have been jealous of his brother's reception. Similarly, had the Pharisees retained any due remembrance of that loving God and Father of whom their own Scriptures spoke, they could never have looked with such coldness of heart on the ruin of that Father's children, or failed to appreciate our Lord's love for them. The principal thing accordingly which our Lord is revealing, alike in these parables and throughout His ministry, is this personal, living, and loving Father, the whole yearnings of whose heart are to win His children back to Himself, and to restore them to His image. The first words of His prayer, "Our Father, which art in heaven," are the key to the whole of His teaching; and He meets every error, every hardness, and every sin in human nature, by recalling, as in this parable, the character of the Father of whom we are children.

It cannot be sufficiently borne in mind that this is what is at stake in the discussions we hear around us respecting the

personal character of God. We must, of course, be incapable of forming any adequate idea of the nature and personality of the Supreme Being, and any words we use respecting Him must fall infinitely short of the reality. But what we are practically concerned with, when maintaining the personal character of God, is to uphold the truth which is enforced by our Lord with such vividness in this parable. We are concerned to believe that we have a Father in heaven, who feels towards each one of us with that unbounded and generous, and in the light of this parable we may venture to say, that human affection, which our Lord depicts so graciously in the relation of the father to the prodigal son. What we are concerned to believe is that in all our wanderings from Him, God has us still in His heart, and that it is our privilege at any moment to turn our faces towards our heavenly home with the certainty that, when we are yet a great way off, He will come forward to welcome us, to receive us back,

to forgive all our past evil, and to call for the best robe in which to clothe our nakedness. Nothing is so lamentably short of the urgency of the case, nothing can so entirely miss the point, as the purely abstract arguments which are sometimes urged on this subject. The question at issue is this: Have we, as moral beings, moral relations, not only with our fellows, but with a living God of all righteousness, grace and love, and may we look up to Him, at all moments of our lives, with sure confidence that He will hear us and guide us?

Our Lord, in revealing His Father to us in this character, touched anew the springs of the deepest feelings in the human heart. He taught men to care for each other, as well as to care for themselves. He awoke in the most lost soul the sense that it had yet a life worth living, and that a home of the most blessed affections was still open to it. He aroused in hard hearts the sense that, if all were thus precious to the God of heaven and earth, all ought to be similarly precious

to themselves. It would be unjust to human nature to say that such feelings have not existed apart from the revelation of Christ—or rather it would be unjust to the God who created that human nature in His own image. But the history of the world certainly shows that you cannot maintain these feelings of affection, you cannot keep human hearts really tender, whether in respect to their own consciences or in their relations to others, except so far as you maintain them in conscious relation to a Father in heaven in whom they live, and move, and have their being. Our Lord relied in all His teaching on that revelation. He avoids, as long as He can, dealing with men in wrath and just indignation. He abstains, as long as He can, from denouncing even the Pharisees themselves. He prefers, as in this parable, to endeavour to touch their hearts by revealing the love and grace which they are forgetting, and thus strives to soften their souls by these touches of divine and human nature. If this fails, nothing remains

but that furiousness of indignation and wrath, displeasure and trouble, which in the end He poured on the heads of the scribes and Pharisees; but He strives, to the very last, to move them by these exquisite pictures of Divine Love and Fatherhood.

It is for us to endeavour to bear in mind more constantly these gracious pictures, as the revelation to ourselves of the deepest realities in our own lives. Our temptations are precisely similar to those with which our Lord was dealing in this instance, and our salvation is to be found in believing and acting on the simple truths of the parable. One peculiar danger of our day, as has been already implied, is to obscure this personal relation. Abstract philosophical difficulties on the one side, scientific difficulties on the other, are pressed upon us, with the view, or at least with the tendency, of making us acquiesce in a conception of life practically identical with that of the Pharisees—a life governed entirely by fixed laws, in which certain classes and races have special

privileges, and in which the others must be left to suffer the consequences of their failures or their weaknesses. Let us not hesitate to acknowledge that there are difficulties and perplexities in the world around us which it is beyond our finite intelligence to disentangle. Let us not fail to recognize also, and to remember for our guidance and for our warning, that to a large extent, in the course of His divine education of our souls, God does leave us to bear the natural consequences of our conduct, and that in the general course of His moral government He maintains His ordinary laws in full operation. His method of education is like that of the father in the parable. If a man says to Him, in practice, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," He may see fit to yield to the request, and to allow the man to learn, by his own experience, the vanity of the worldly pleasures which he has chosen. To a great extent we all have to bear the natural punishment of our sins, and we can never expect to be

fully relieved from it until we are finally received into the eternal home of our Father. But the maintenance of this discipline is perfectly compatible, as this parable shows, with absolute forgiveness and love on our Father's part, as well as with His gracious help to temper the difficulties and trials we have brought upon ourselves and others, and to lead us, by His Spirit, more and more in the right path. In short, amidst all our perplexities, it is our privilege to accept our Lord's assurance in faith; and, in reliance on it, to turn our hearts to our Father in heaven, to believe that He is at every moment at our side, bound to us by the love and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcoming us in proportion to the sincerity and faith with which we turn to Him and rely upon Him.

This is the only adequate encouragement we can have when sensible of our evil, and desiring to escape from it. He who once realizes the extent to which he has wandered from his heavenly home, and the corruption

which his soul has suffered, will be sensible that it is impossible for him adequately to repent, and still more to recover himself, by his own efforts. But when a man can return to a Divine and Almighty Father, who offers him complete forgiveness, and is able by His Spirit to regenerate and renew him, everything becomes possible. He may be assured that the past will be more and more blotted out, and that henceforth he will be able to live, not merely as the servant, but as the son of God. We must, as has been said, rely on our Lord's own word for this gracious assurance, for the temptations and difficulties of life are far too great to be met by the light of our own reason, or in our own strength. But at the same time, in proportion as we act on this assurance in faith shall we be convinced of its truth by our daily experience. There is nothing to which Christian experience bears more certain witness than that in proportion as a man lifts up his heart in daily prayer to his Father in heaven, trusting to His mercy and

forgiveness for Jesus Christ's sake, seeking the guidance of His Spirit, and honestly striving to follow it, is he sensible of the presence of that Divine Hand, to lead him aright, and to purify him from his evil. The chains of old sins grow daily weaker, the love and appreciation of all goodness grow daily stronger, the soul is sensible that its Heavenly Father has come forth, as in the parable, to meet it, and the apprehension of His love daily increases from faith to sight. If we are sensible, as we all must be, that in one way or another, in greater or less degree, we have acted like the prodigal son, let us be assured, by our Lord's gracious teaching, that our Father is ever longing for us to return, and let us yield Him that answer of love, and trust, and sincere repentance' for which alone He craves at our hands.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."—ST. LUKE xviii. 14.

XVII.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

THIS parable affords a striking instance of our Lord's power to produce the most momentous impression by the simplest and fewest words. It has stamped upon men's hearts an ineradicable perception of the essential vice of the Pharisee, and has created a deep sympathy with the feeling of the Publican, and has thus completely reversed, in the thoughts of Christians, the relation in which the two classes stood towards each other at the time the parable was spoken. If we consider the nature of the effect which has thus been produced, bearing in mind the circumstances and the state of feeling with which our Lord had to deal, we must needs be astonished alike at the result and the method.

We are familiar with the fact that the Pharisee and the Publican represented at that day, in the general estimation of the world, the best and the worst types of character respectively. Our Lord puts this popular estimate in the strongest light when He says, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven;" as though the righteousness of the Pharisees were the highest standard recognized among most of those whom He addressed. He Himself, again, recognized not less clearly the general estimate of the Publicans, by His use of the phrase "publicans and sinners." The admiration, if not the sympathy, of society went with the Pharisee, while the Publicans were the objects of contempt, if not of abhorrence. Those are the two aspects in which, so to say, they appear on the stage, for the purpose of the moral drama which is to be enacted. Yet our Lord, within the space of this short parable, succeeds in entirely reversing these aspects;

His hearers are left in sympathy with the Publican and with aversion from the Pharisee ; and when He says, " I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other," He does but confirm a judgment which has already been evoked from the hearts and consciences of those who listened to the parable. It is the very function of a parable to produce conviction of the truth it is designed to urge by the inherent force of the story. Accordingly, in this instance the effect is produced not merely by the authoritative statement with which our Lord closes the parable, but by the narrative itself. Our Lord has simply placed the Pharisee and the Publican before us in a special relation ; He has revealed to us, by a single incident in their lives, the real secrets of their hearts ; and we at once see them in their true character, and realize, with all the force of a vivid experience, the vital principle on which He is insisting.

Now we shall best appreciate the lesson the parable conveys if we inquire what are the means by which, so to say, this wonderful

transformation of ordinary social judgment is produced. It is not done, we may observe, by any such detailed examination of the characters of the two men as our Lord might have made. Nothing is said to disparage the Pharisee's claim to the virtues on which he prided himself; on the other hand, nothing is said to vindicate the Publican from the vices with which the Pharisee charges him. Each man is left in the character commonly attributed to him, so far as his ordinary actions are concerned, and is, so to say, taken as he stands. It would doubtless have been possible, in any particular case, to have exposed the hollowness of the Pharisee's claim to many of the very virtues of which he boasted, and on the other hand, to have exhibited features of excellence in the character of the Publican, which had been obscured and overlaid by his vices. That is a common method among writers who wish to awaken our sympathy for classes who are degraded, and to show how much good there may be in the vicious, and how much vice in the apparently good.

But our Lord produces an infinitely deeper impression by a far simpler method. Instead of comparing these men with one another, or examining minutely their special characteristics, He brings them both before one supreme standard. The moment He takes for placing them before us is when they went up into the Temple to pray. By that simple expedient—if the expression may be allowed in speaking of the divine art of these parables—He brings the Pharisee and the Publican into a relation in which men were not wont to consider them, brings a new light to bear on their characters, and thus compels us to recognize the really central facts of their moral position. As long as the two men were contemplated in their positions in the world around them—the Pharisee in his conspicuous, even if ostentatious, justness and strictness of conduct; the Publican in his extortionate occupation, and perhaps in his actual avarice and deceit—the one man surrounded with social respect, the other delivered over to social contempt—so long it might have been difficult to regard

them with a judgment very different from that of the society of the day. The one was comparatively elevated in character, the other at least comparatively degraded, and it might be difficult to see by what means they could be brought together on any terms of equality. Our Lord, therefore, removes them, by this parable, from this purely human and social sphere. He takes them completely away from their fellows, into another and a higher world. He depicts them going up into the Temple to pray ; He thus places them in the presence of God, and bids us see how that presence alters altogether the relations in which they stand.

The immediate effect is precisely that which our Lord expresses in the maxim with which He concludes the parable, and which he endorses in a similar connection on other occasions. He that exalteth himself is abased, he that humbleth himself is exalted. We at once perceive that a substantial equality is established between the two men. As long as the Pharisee was priding himself on his high qualities and

virtués in the presence of his fellow-men, it might be difficult to perceive, or at least to make conspicuous, the unreasonableness of his pride. But the moment he begins to boast of such excellences in the presence of God, we are sensible of the hollowness and enormity of the sentiment. Allowing that he were not as other men are, or even as this Publican, what was that in the presence of Him who charges even His angels with folly, and in whose sight the heavens are not pure? In the very pride thus exhibited in such a presence we feel at once the Pharisee's utterly inadequate conception of the righteousness which was required of him, the miserable imperfection of his own ideas of truth, and purity, and self-denial: while in his contempt of others, and his heartless disregard of them, in the absence of any prayer or wish for their salvation, he reveals the presence in his heart of one of the worst vices of human nature. The Pharisee is thus self-condemned the moment he comes into that Presence, and opens the secrets of

his heart before it. There is no need to enter into a detailed judgment of the weaknesses and imperfections of his conduct, such as is given in the Sermon on the Mount. All is revealed in a moment by the sense of the Divine presence, and by the awful contrast, at once suggested to our minds, between the Pharisee's presumptuous imperfection and the perfect holiness and mercy of the God before whom he presented himself.

On the other hand, an equally sudden light breaks on the position of the Publican, and gives him a new dignity and a new hope. Sensible that he can make no claim to any excellence which would justify him in appealing for God's approval, conscious only of his sin, his weakness, and his need, he throws himself on the mercy of God, and in that very act obtains a new position and a new prospect. We are sensible that the prayer, that God would be merciful to him a sinner, is an appeal which, if uttered in sincerity of heart, could not fail to be

heard; and that the hope was thus opened to the Publican, not merely of forgiveness, but of amendment and purification. The only hope for the Pharisee was that he might be abased, be made sensible of his inherent evil, and thus compelled to place himself on the level of the Publican before God, smiting his breast, and exclaiming, in his turn, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The hope is obviously open to the Publican that he may, in all sincerity, have reason to thank God that he is delivered from his extortion, his injustice, or his lust, and thus be able to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain." The abasement of the Pharisee, the exaltation of the Publican, are conspicuous even as they stand in the Temple; for they are in the presence of One who "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

It would be difficult to find a more forcible illustration of the momentous necessity for maintaining a true faith in God, if the

principles and practice of morality are to be maintained among us, and in our own hearts, in full vigour and reality. There are two aspects in which this question ought to be considered, each of vital importance, but very distinct in character. The first is whether the principle of duty in general, and the particular obligations of a lofty morality, have any ultimate foundation except in the revealed will of God. That is a fundamental question of the most vital importance; but it is not that which is illustrated by this parable. The former may be said to concern morality in the abstract; but the point on which this parable throws such light is the importance of a true knowledge of God, and of a true faith in Him, to morality in the concrete; that is to say, to the moral character and life of individual men. That which the character of the Pharisee illustrates is that, even when men admit a high standard of morality in the abstract, they are so imperfect, so liable to self-deception, and so prone to deceive and

flatter each other, that in the midst of the loftiest professions, they are capable of the most grievous corruptions, and the most dangerous and subtle vices. Measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, men cannot be truly wise, or maintain a just conception of the excellence required of them. Once suppose, if that be possible, the conception of a divine judgment and a divine standard to be lost sight of, or suppose rather, to put the matter more simply and truly, the apprehension of a living God to whom we are accountable being lost, and the temptation which is illustrated in the case of the Pharisee would be irresistible—for men to compare themselves with one another, and for those who were superior in the excellences of mind, and will, and character, which make their way in society, to be content with this false standard of social admiration, and in greater or less degree to trust in themselves that they were righteous, and to despise others.

There is no temptation more conspicuously illustrated by all history, whether in that of the East or West, in the ancient world or in modern society. The tendency of human nature, apart from the perception of its relation to a living God and Judge and Saviour, is to establish castes of one kind or another, to pride itself on the excellences which are admired in the world of such castes, and to stand aloof from those who are without them. Standards become hardened, ideas narrowed, and men's hearts become selfish and self-satisfied. On the other hand, without this sense of a living God and Saviour, those classes which, like the Publican, too often from the pressure of circumstances, become degraded, have no hope, or none sufficient to inspire in them generally any strenuous efforts after recovery and purification. The tendency of society, if contemplated by itself, is, no doubt, to depress the weak and to increase the dominion of the strong. Those who have yielded to temptation in the struggle of life, and who have forfeited their position or

character, or those who have inherited conditions of existence which depress, and it may be degrade, them, have comparatively little hope in the mere circumstances of social life; and there must thus be a constant tendency, in a society which stands by itself, to separate more and more into classes like the Pharisee and the Publican.

Of course, on the other hand, the parable contains a not less conspicuous warning of the powerlessness of a mere intellectual belief in God to remedy these evils. Never was the name of God held formally in higher reverence than among the Jews in our Lord's day. They believed that there was one God, and they did well; but because it was a mere formal belief, it was, for practical purposes, worse than no belief at all. The distinguished historian Ewald has vividly described the formalism which the belief in God's existence had at this time assumed among the Jews. He says:—

“The whole of the internal weakness and perverseness of the hagiocracy betrays itself

in the one small but significant circumstance of its treatment of the name of God. Desiring to maintain the infinite sanctity of the venerable name of Jahveh, and fearful of degrading it, they ordained that it should never be pronounced at all, and so allowed this glorious ancient name to lie in absolute obscurity behind a perpetual veil. . . . The name of the true God was now suspended at an infinite distance, high above all the present scene of existence. Consequently, this God of the ancient community, though men feared His name above all things, and desired utterly to surrender themselves to Him in deepest awe, was in reality ever retiring further and further from them into a mysterious distance; and while they were restrained, by their scruples from looking into His face, or calling on Him by His true name, they were really losing Him more and more; so undesigned was this most significant of all the signs of Israel's last era." To the Pharisee in the parable the name of God had thus become a mere

name and form of the intellect; God had ceased to be a living reality to him, and thus exerted no longer a quickening force on his conscience.

Doubtless, we have need to take deeply to heart the fearful warning conveyed by the fact that the most intense Pharisaism ever seen was developed under a system in which the primary truths of our own religion were fully recognized, and were acknowledged as a Divine revelation. A Christian Pharisee is as possible as a Jewish. But at the same time those truths—this belief in a living God and Saviour—when received into the heart, and not merely into the intellect, are the only means of deliverance from these terrible perversions of morality, the only effectual means of abasing those who are unduly exalted, and of exalting those who have fallen. It is when we realize in our hearts that the essential element, in which we live and move and have our spiritual being, is not the society of our fellows alone, but that of a God of all

holiness, purity, truth, and love—then it is that we can be duly sensible of our miserable weakness and evil, and that we can be stirred to ever more strenuous efforts after the utmost purification of heart and soul, of thought and will. In that Presence, in proportion as we realize it, none of us can look with satisfaction on our feeble and imperfect attainments, none of us can dare thank God, in a Pharisaic spirit, that we are not as other men are. On the other hand, realizing that Presence, not merely as the presence of a Judge, but of a living and loving Saviour, who is ever striving to bring us into harmony with Himself, who is able, by His Spirit, to purge out of us, more and more, whatever sins we may be conscious of, it is equally impossible for any of us to despair. Whenever the cry of the Publican is forced from our consciences, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” we have uttered a prayer which contains a justification for infinite possibilities of hope, we have the witness of God's own

Spirit in our hearts that deliverance and salvation, and ever-increasing growth in goodness are possible for us. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought;" but the Spirit which forced such a prayer from the heart of the Publican, and which breathes similar utterances from our own lips, is, in that very assistance, making intercession for us.

If, in a word, we would keep our own moral life true and vigorous, free from Pharisaism on the one hand, and from the desperation natural to the Publican and the sinner on the other, we have but to follow the guidance afforded by our Lord's method in this parable—we need but "go up into the Temple to pray," or enter into our own closets in true sincerity of heart, and with a real apprehension at once of the holiness and of the mercy of the God whom we are approaching. Then will insincerity and self-satisfaction be burned out of our hearts, and we shall learn at the same time to look to that God who declares His almighty

power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity, for such a measure of His grace that we may run the way of His commandments more perfectly. Above all is this influence brought to bear on us in attending that holy Sacrament in which our Lord has established the most potent of all influences for delivering us from Pharisaism on the one side, and from despair on the other. In the remembrance, which at that holy table is so vividly forced on us, not only of the holiness of our Saviour, but of His love, of His death and of His suffering on our behalf, who can fail to have all other thoughts of himself dismissed from his mind but those of sorrow, and repentance, and humiliation, and yet who can fail to derive consolation and hope from the "comfortable words" which are there addressed to him? What words, in short, could better sum up the lesson of this parable than those in which we are invited to approach that holy Table?—"We do not presume to come to this Thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our

own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy Table. But Thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy."

THE SAVIOUR'S INVITATION.

*"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest."*—MATT. xi. 28.

XVIII.

THE SAVIOUR'S INVITATION.

IT may be assumed that every one is sensible of the attractiveness and grace of these familiar words. They address themselves to the greatest and most universal need of mankind, and they speak in a tone of tenderness and assurance which touches, even when it does not always win, every thoughtful heart. Those that labour and are heavy laden are the great majority of mankind—nay, if we take into account the various vicissitudes of human life, they may be said to include all mankind. There come to every soul some hours at least, it may be days or even years, of sickness, weakness, and sorrow, when these comfortable words speak to it with the only voice that meets its needs. To every soul,

in youth as well as in age, in health as well as in weakness, there come also moments or periods of struggle with some sharp temptation, sometimes of the flesh, sometimes of the spirit, when it longs, with an intense craving, for some comforter and guide, who can give it rest. There are hours and years of life, indeed, when this feeling may be absent, when youth, and strength, and excitement may leave little room for a sense of travail and burden, and when life is a continual feast. But to all, it may be safely said, the moment arrives when these comfortable words are craved for, as water by a thirsty soul; and to all, at all times, these words of comfort are spoken. "Come unto Me," says the Saviour, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No one practically doubts that the words were uttered. This invitation, at least, is no invention of later days. We know, as the words are read to us, that we are listening to a strong and tender voice, inviting us, as it invited those who first heard it, to come to the gracious

Person who utters it, and be at rest, or be refreshed.

But in what capacity does our Lord utter this invitation, and what is its practical meaning? That inquiry is, perhaps, the most characteristic and the most important of our time. In some of the most interesting literature of the day, and in some sincere efforts after virtue and truth, there is an interpretation put upon these and similar words which is very different from the old Christian interpretation of them, but which seems to be attractive to much earnest thought. Such minds cannot willingly separate themselves from the Author of this invitation; but an aversion from the supernatural elements of the Gospel narrative induces them to seek for a purely natural interpretation of the words. They would represent them, accordingly, as the voice of a teacher, inviting men simply to find rest for their souls in following the path of life which he has laid down for their feet. "Do I believe," exclaims the chief character in a recent popular novel—"do I believe in Christ?

Yes, in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol to us Westerns of all things heavenly and abiding, the image and pledge of the invisible life of the spirit—with all my soul and with all my mind. But in the Man-God, the Word from eternity, in a wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus, in the living intercessor and mediator for the lives of His tempted brethren—to that the answer is a negative one. “Every human soul,” he says, “in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the Divine Sonship ; and miracles do not happen.” If that answer were to be adopted, the touching words of the text would have to be interpreted in a purely figurative meaning. “Come unto Me,” would then imply only, “Come unto my teaching,” and they would be only a stronger personification of the voice in the book of Proverbs : “Now therefore hearken unto Me, O ye children ; for blessed are they that keep My ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates,

waiting at the posts of My doors ; for whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." The revelation in the Gospels would be only a further revelation of wisdom, and the voice which sounds so attractive to suffering human hearts would simply be that of a gentler and deeper teacher.

It will be instructive, therefore, to consider in what connection, and in what character, our Lord uttered these words. They occur at the close of one of the most remarkable incidents in His ministry, in which He had been specially challenged to declare His nature and office. John, hearing in the prison the works of Christ, sent unto Him two of his disciples, saying unto Him, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another ?" and our Lord's answer had been a direct appeal to His miracles. "Go and show John again," He said, "those things which ye do hear and see : the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to

them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." The question whether He was the One that should come, the One who should satisfy all the hopes and cravings of His people, was answered by the fact that He had exhibited, and was daily exhibiting, a supernatural power to heal the sick, to make the maimed whole, and to bring a message of peace and forgiveness to the poor. He goes on to take special occasion to rebuke those who witnessed these mighty works of His, and had not yielded to their witness and repented. "Then began He," we are told, "to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." These mighty works of mercy, these evidences of His power over all human evils,

ought to have led men to trust Him, and to have made the invitation, "Come unto Me," almost unnecessary. Such works were an invitation by deed, as well as word, to come unto Him. The power was not put forth to coerce men's consciences and force them to come to Him, as might be done by an earthly ruler. They were manifestations of grace and mercy which ought to have drawn men's hearts towards Him, and should have led to Him all who felt themselves heavy laden. That was their purpose. His message to these cities had been a continuous rehearsal in act of the message He sent to John; His miracles were a perpetual declaration that "blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me;" and if men had not the heart to hear that message, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

But it is further very observable that our Lord proceeds to intimate the reasons which had prevented their acceptance of Him. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank

Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in Thy sight." It was the wise and prudent, the learned and authoritative class of the Jews, by whom the evidence of these miracles, wrought with such love and truth, was resisted. Even when the occurrence of miracles had no general presumption against it, there was then, as much as now, the possibility of explaining them away. There always remained, at the worst, the facile explanation, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." Some conspiracy with evil spirits, some jugglery such as modern critics have suggested, could equally be suggested then ; and in this way the plain and natural witness of our Lord's mighty works was continually evaded during His lifetime. His position before the world then was, in fact, not really very different from what it is now. If men now doubt the occurrence of miracles, they doubted then whether the mighty works they

saw, and heard reported, were genuine acts of Divine Omnipotence, or were capable of some explanation compatible with the purely human character of the person who wrought them. If men will not believe testimony now, neither would they believe their own eyes then ; and they blinded themselves, by some sophistical reasoning or other, to the plain and natural import of our Lord's words and works. It needed simple and unprejudiced hearts to appreciate even the direct personal testimony of our Lord Himself. The wise and prudent could close their eyes and ears by learned arguments, and the truth was only apparent to babes.

Let it not be said that such an observation places religious truth, or the claims of our Lord, on a basis different from that of other truths. This very observation is borrowed by Lord Bacon to express the indispensable condition for apprehending the truths of natural science. After his exposure of the idols by which the human mind is obstructed in its apprehension of natural truth, he con-

cludes, that all such idols, all such prejudices, of the intellect "must be abandoned and renounced by a firm and solemn decree, and the mind must be absolutely liberated and purged from them ; so that there is practically no other mode of approach to the kingdom of man, which is founded on the sciences, than to the kingdom of heaven, 'into which no one can enter except in the character of a little child.'" Accordingly, our Lord proceeds to affirm, most solemnly, in a passage which reveals His most lofty claims, and which is in perfect harmony with His teaching in the Gospel of St. John, that the truths on which men's peace and salvation depend can only be learned by those who submit themselves to Him, as the sole revelation of His Father. "All things," He says, "are delivered unto Me of My Father : and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father : neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." What a contrast to the presumptuous conclusion quoted just now from the popular author of our day ! "Every soul," so the

sceptic concludes, "in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the Divine Sonship." "No man," says Jesus of Nazareth Himself, "knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." There is an absolutely unique relation, He declares, between the Father and Himself, and no one can go to the Father but by Him.

For these reasons it is, in the light of these miracles, which did happen then—no Christian says they happen now; it is the very ground of our belief that they happened when our Lord wrought them, and do not happen except at His command—in the light of these miracles which then happened with such gracious profusion, in the profound assurance that our Lord knows the Father as no other human soul has ever known Him, that no one comes to the Father but by Him, that no one knows the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him—in the light of these mighty works and these mighty

assurances it is, that He exclaims, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Such is the Saviour, the Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of all good things, who utters the gracious invitation in the text. What else, in fact, could give the words the weight and force of their natural meaning? Were there not this Divine power in the speaker, this ability to bring the soul into union and harmony with the Father of all, what would be practically the meaning of that assurance, to all travailing souls, that "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light"? Take the case of a soul, more common than seems supposed, struggling with some passion, the victim of some life-long temptation, with powers marred by having long yielded to evil, with a burdened conscience for the past, and a sense of powerlessness for the future;

is it an easy matter for such a soul to take upon itself the yoke of all meekness, and purity, and faithfulness, and self-denial ?

“ Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,
How often must it love, how often hate !
How often hope, despair, resent, regret,
Conceal, disdain—do all things but forget ! ”

When the conscience is awakened, and a corrupt soul realizes the distance between itself and the Father of all truth whom our Lord reveals, the natural impulse is one of despair—the exclamation of St. Peter, “ Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” That which justifies the assertion, “ My yoke is easy, and My burden is light,” is the assurance of a Saviour’s voice, ever near to the conscience, bespeaking at once His fellowship with human weakness and temptation, and His oneness with the Father of all ; and the consequent assurance that we can place our hands in His strong and tender grasp, and that if we cling to Him He will guide us in the right way, which leadeth unto

everlasting life, through this world and the next. When that voice is realized as the voice of a living Saviour, with all power in heaven and earth, the soul can then take up the words of the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Or take even the commoner, if not more general, burdens of life, of sickness and poverty; it is true men may face them bravely without the Gospel, as millions of human beings do to this day, under other religions. It is an ill argument for our faith to disparage the strength and courage which God has implanted in the hearts of His creatures, and which doubtless He sustains by His invisible influences. But because brave souls can struggle through darkness and storm by the twilight of reason, is that any ground for disparaging or neglecting the gracious voice which speaks to them, and the gracious hand which is held out to

them, to lighten their burdens and to illumine their path? It does make even the yoke of sickness and poverty comparatively light to realize that One in the form of the Son of man is standing by the sufferer, whispering the words, "Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." Such is the practical comfort of those great truths respecting our Lord's supernatural power and Divine nature, which some would put aside as speculative dogmas. The Church has clung to the dogmas because of their profound and intense practical import. Unless Christ were more than man, these words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," lose the power and the grace which have won so many souls, and sustained them in their struggles. As God as well as man, we can not only obey Him, but come to Him. We can speak to Him in prayer, we can appeal to Him in our temptations and our sufferings, and in the hour of death, and can trust ourselves to Him as our gracious

Creator and most merciful Saviour. No one has ever accepted this assurance in faith and found it fail. The Saviour cannot, indeed, bestow on us this rest and salvation without our own co-operation. But if we take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, striving in our daily lives to live in His true faith and obedience, He will guide and support us here, and will give us perfect rest at last in that place which He has gone to prepare for us, and in those mansions in which He has assured His followers of an eternal home.

THE END.

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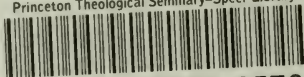
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